Syposium on *Perezhivanie*

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**Perezhivanie. From the Dictionary of Psychology**

_Perezhivanie_ is one of the most complex psychological constructs, and as a result, a number of different interpretations are compatible. Most understandings of _perezhivanie_ emphasize its emotional coloredness, direct representation in the consciousness of the subject and its link with events in the subject’s personal life. Dilthey gave _perezhivanie_ such a great significance, that he replaced the traditional triad “contemplation - thinking - action” with “_perezhivanie_ - expression - understanding” making _perezhivanie_ the basis of understanding psychology and pedagogy. G. I. Chelpanov took _perezhivanie_ as a very capacious category, covering knowledge, feeling and will. This understanding is close to the English term _experience_, which designates simultaneously _perezhivanie_ and _opit_. However, in Russian, the word is more expressive of the emotional-personal content, which presents the synthesis of knowledge-relation. In the same sense S. L. Rubenstein claims: “_perezhivanie_ becomes for the person that which proves to be personally significant for them.” According to A. N. Leontyev, emotional _perezhivanie_ are manifested as internal signals, by means of which are realized the personal sense of an event. F. E. Vasilyuk understands _perezhivanie_ as the special form of activity, which appears in situations of the impossibility of the subject achieving the leading motives and plans of their life, the wreck of ideals and meaning, the result of which is the transformation of mental reality; Vasilyuk accentuates the sense of “to survive”, i.e., to pass through usually painful events, to overcome a difficult feeling, to endure, to maintain._

_Perezhivanie_ is one of the key concepts in the theory of L. S. Vygotsky, closely related to other concepts: the social situation of development, the zone of the proximal development, development crises, psychological age. Vygotsky emphasized complex and integral nature of _perezhivanie_, making this concept the connecting link between the internal peace of the mind and the reality that surrounds it:

_A _perezhivanie_ is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced – a _perezhivanie_ is always related to something which is found outside the person – and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e., all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in a _perezhivanie_; everything selected from the environment and all the factors which are related to our personality and are selected from the personality, all the features of its character, its constitutional elements, which are related to the event in question. So, in a _perezhivanie_ we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the _perezhivanie_. (Vygotsky, _The Problem of the Environment_).

_Perezhivanie_ was given special attention by Vygotsky in studying the nature and the process of aesthetic creation, intelligible in light of his constant interest in the psychology of skill; however, he did not see a fundamental difference between aesthetic and unaesthetic _perezhivanie_, but, on the contrary, emphasized their unified nature. Vygotsky identified the problem of development of _perezhivanie_ in ontogenesis, which is reflected in the comparison of children's and teenagers' _perezhivanie_ and understanding the essence of ages through _perezhivanie_ which are characteristic for them.

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According to the theory of Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* can be approached like any other mental function which in ontogenesis is developed from involuntary and direct forms to the highest forms, which have status of action or activity. This approach offers possibilities for distinguishing the different genetic forms *perezhivanie*, and also for the search for the cultural-historical means of mastery of *perezhivanie*.

**Note on translation**

Throughout this Special Issue of *MCA*, the Russian word, Переживание, is rendered as *perezhivanie* (*perezhivaniya*, plural), even where it has been translated in published English translations cited by the authors. The various verb forms of Переживание have been rendered as *perezhivat*.

In addition, there are numerous instances in the standard English translations of the mistranslation of *edinitsa* (unit) and *edinstvo* (unity). Nikolai Veresov deals with this problem in the article included in this volume. Where these terms have been interchanged in cited translation, the correction is made, with the Russian word indicated in square brackets.
Translating *perezhivanie* into English*

*Andy Blunden*

An outline is suggested for how the word *perezhivanie* can be appropriated from Russian Psychology in general and Vygotskian psychology in particular, as a meaningful word in English-language Psychology, drawing on cognate concepts from Freud, Winnicott, Dewey, Kübler-Ross, Stanislavskii, et al. It is suggested that through its connection with the working out of a person’s life-projects, *perezhivanie* plays a key role in connecting Psychology with Social Theory.

**Introduction**

*perezhivanie* is a complex concept and there is no translation of the word into English which captures even the core content of the concept, let alone the range of connotations entailed in the Russian. Hitherto, only one English translation of Vygotsky’s works contains any indication at all of the meaning of the word. *The Problem of the Environment* (1934), is the text of a lecture delivered in 1934, the second in a series, the first being *The Problem of Heredity*. The point of the article was to set out a foundation for analyzing the role of a child’s social environment in the formation of their personality, as opposed to the part played by their genetic inheritance.

Although *perezhivanie* also figures in other works, such as *The Psychology of Art*, the English translations make Vygotsky’s use of *perezhivanie* invisible. Vygotsky was not inventing a new concept however. The concept of *perezhivanie* has a firm place in Russian literature and culture generally, and it was in general only necessary for Vygotsky to mention the word *‘perezhivanie’* for Russian-speakers to understand the concept being referred to. Its place in a scientific theory of psychology is another matter, of course, and this is by no means easily grasped whatever your native tongue, as the concept is inevitably modified by its incorporation into a scientific theory.

**No mystery**

*perezhivanie* is not a complete mystery to English-speakers however. To the extent that the phenomena are manifest within the British and American cultures, they are known to English speakers, and the psychological implications have been examined by English and German-speaking psychologists with whom English speakers will be familiar. The recognition of points of commonality between the English-speaking and Russian traditions have been obscured by the difficulties encountered, not just by English speakers in reading Russian, but also by Russians trying to explain the concept in English, and the difficulty in grasping the Marxist / Hegelian concept of ‘unity’.

The first thing to know about *perezhivanie* is that it is a *countable* noun (like ‘tool’ or ‘litre’) not a mass noun (like equipment or water). So when we use *perezhivanie* as a word in the English language it must carry an article (i.e., ‘the’ or ‘a’) or be used in the plural – *perezhivaniya*, or with an appropriate pronoun like ‘every’.

The countable/mass distinction is available in all languages, but it is indicated in different ways. In English it is the use or absence of articles, but Russian does not use articles, and it is difficult for speakers of languages, such as Russian or Punjabi, which do not have articles to figure out how to use them when speaking English. So it is quite common for a Russian speaker to explain *perezhivanie* by saying something like: “*Perezhivanie* is unit of personality.” The English-speaking listener knows that ‘unit’ is a countable noun, and if they were to repeat this expression they probably would say: “*Perezhivanie* is a unit of the personality.” But being unfamiliar with Russian, they do not realize that *perezhivanie* is a countable noun; yet only countable nouns can be units of anything! So an English speaker who says “*Perezhivanie* is a unit of personality,” but goes on to discuss *perezhivaniya* without ever using the plural or an article, is showing that they do not understand the meaning of the word ‘unit’. For example:

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“Tool is unit of equipment” is poor English, but “Equipment is a unit of property” is more than bad English; it is an oxymoron. Even though very few native English-speakers are aware of the countable/mass distinction, we all use it without conscious awareness. ‘Tool’ and ‘litre’ are countable so we say something like: “Tools are units of equipment,” and “The unit of water is a litre,” but “Equipment is an element of property,” not a unit.

We have the same situation with ‘activity’. ‘Activity’ (without the article) is a mass noun, but we use the same word as a countable noun for the units of activity. That is: “Activity is made up of many activities.” But for a Russian speaker: “Activity is unit of activity,” and alas English speakers have often been content to emulate this oxymoronic English.

So it has come to pass that English speakers have both accepted ‘perezhivanie’ as a mass noun (never having heard anyone use it in the plural or with an article), and deprived the word ‘unit’ of its meaning. This suggests that when people read Vygotsky on ‘unit of analysis’ they interpret ‘unit’ to be something other than what they know it to mean, perhaps just the ‘subject matter’. Consequently, the claim that “Perezhivaniya are units of the personality” is completely mystified. Since perezhivanie is a scientific concept by virtue of its inclusion in a scientific theory, this mistake obscures Vygotsky’s scientific concept of perezhivanie.

Perezhivaniya have a beginning a middle and an end; they are events, episodes, activities, happenings or experiences in which people are active participants.

The typical English translation of ‘perezhivanie’ is ‘experience’ sometimes carrying the qualifiers: ‘emotional experience’ or ‘lived experience’, or the neolog ‘experiencing’. The word ‘experience’, whether or not qualified as ‘emotional’ or ‘lived’, when used without an article, is a mass noun. ‘Experience’ is that passive background of activity which is the fundamental concept of Empiricism – the historically dominant current in Anglo-American analytical science, or an accumulated mass of knowledge and skills. When perezhivanie is interpreted as ‘experience’ and taken to be the fundamental factor in the formation of personality and knowledge for Vygotsky, then this is in effect to assimilate Vygotsky’s Marxist Psychology into Anglo-American Empiricism. On the contrary, Activity Theory takes personality and knowledge to be something actively constructed by the subject.

In Russian, there is a word for ‘experience’ in the sense it is used in Empiricism – ‘experience’ as in the opening words of Kant’s (1787) Critique of Pure Reason: “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience” – and the sense in which ‘experience’ is used, for example, when an employer asks for your ‘work experience’. That word is opit. Perezhivanie is different from opit, and Russian has two different words for the two concepts.

An Experience

The idea of ‘an experience’ was outlined by John Dewey in his article “Having an Experience” (1939) in perfectly clear English prose which any English-speaker could understand.

Dewey explained the “double-barreled” nature of the concept of ‘an experience’ in that “it includes what men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and how men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine.” (1929, p. 256). Experiences are countable: “each with its own plot, its own inception and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement” (1939, p. 555). He explained that ‘an experience’ was an ‘original unity’, not a combination: “The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it.” (1939, p. 556) And he understood its origin in the resolution of problems or crises: “The unsettled or indeterminate situation might have been called a problematic situation. ... Without a problem, there is blind groping in the dark.” (1938, p. 229) All these are facets of perezhivaniya.

Dewey’s concept of ‘an experience’ goes only halfway to covering the concept Russians have of perezhivanie, but it is the best approximation we have in a single word, within the English language and Anglo-American culture.

Freud also was familiar with perezhivanie and his psychoanalysis aimed to assist patients in “remembering, repeating and working-through” past experiences, supposedly concerned with childhood sexuality. The British child psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott’s (1971) work on weaning, that is, the successful parting of mother and child, was also concerned with
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross whose work on dying is well-known in the Anglosphere was also dealing with how пerezhivaniya play out in time.

Etymology

A look at the etymology of пerezhivanie gives us a glimpse of why ‘an experience’ fails to capture the concept of пerezhivanie (See Robbins 2007).

Пerezhivanie comes from the verb пerezhivat. Zhivat means ‘to live’ and пеrе means carrying something over something, letting something pass beneath and overleaping it, something like cutting out a piece of space, time or feeling. So пerezhivat means to be able to sur-vive after some disaster, i.e., to ‘over-live’ something. To illustrate the force of пере: terpet means to endure some pain, so перетерпеть means to live until a time when no pain is left, to outlive the pain; пereпрыгнуть means to overcome some obstacle, to jump or fly over it.

In the same way, пerezhivat means that you have passed as if above something that had made you feel pain; and in the base of each “again living” lies a pain and you know that. There, inside of a recollection that we call an “again living” – lives your pain, not letting you forget what has happened, and you keep living through it over and over again, working-through it, repeating it until you have passed through it, and have survived. Most of the above words are quoted from an email message from Dot Robbins (2007), who goes on to remark that пerezhivanie “really captures the ‘Russian soul’.”

But it is also important that there can be good as well as painful пerezhivaniya (Kotik-Friedgut 2007), that пerezhivanie is not only surviving a life-changing disaster, but also consolidating on a dramatic leap forward in your life, a daring move you made, a risk that paid off and opened a new phase of your life.

Fully developed пerezhivaniya are tied up with the fate of one’s life-projects and are life-changing episodes in your life, and they begin in a moment of especial clarity.

Catharsis

Having had an experience and surviving it is no guarantee that there will be any impact on your psychology, or any personal development made from it. The experience has to be processed in some way. Пerezhivaniya differ from experiences in that a пerezhivanie includes the ‘processing’ of an experience, working over and assimilating it into your personality. As such, a пerezhivanie may continue for years after a catastrophic experience, such as the death of a loved one. Пerezhivaniya may also constitute experiences which extend over many years, such as a period in exile or a childhood with an alcoholic parent, provided only that the experience and the working over has a certain unifying quality, that it comprises a coherent and memorable episode in your life.

So it is evident why we cannot find a single word in the English language to translate пerezhivanie: a пerezhivanie is both an experience (in the sense in which Dewey explained) and the ‘working over’ of it.

This process of working over is known as ‘catharsis’. In its original meaning in ancient Greece, catharsis was the experience of an audience who, when watching a tragedy at the theatre externalized their emotions by empathizing with the performers who were acting it out for them. This was deemed to have a healthy effect, what might be called ‘purging’ oneself of the emotion. Later, the early medical profession used ‘catharsis’ to refer to the use of a purgative which would induce catharsis, namely vomiting out the material causing illness. Freud (1914) gave catharsis a psychoanalytic meaning, referring to a patient remembering and repeating an emotional experience through a therapist (like the actor on the ancient Greek stage), and working through the experience, overcoming and ‘surviving’ (to use the Russian idea), ‘transcending’ it or ‘sublating’ it to use the Hegelian term. So this process of working through is well-known to English speakers, but we do not have a single word which encompasses both the traumatic experience and the catharsis.

So we should not attempt to translate пerezhivanie – пerezhivanie is a uniquely Russian concept, though one which is accessible to English speakers provided that it is explained. We need to assimilate пerezhivanie as a word in the English language, using it in our research and writing and thereby building up a concept of пerezhivanie within English language scientific literature – not identical with the word as it is within Russian culture and literature, but our concept
of *perezhivanie* – based on the understanding that *perezhivanie* means the whole process of a potentially life-changing experience inclusive of the working over of that experience in a ‘catharsis’.

As an activity which is drawn out in time, a *perezhivanie* typically passes through stages. In a chapter on grief in his *Psychology of Experiencing* (1984, pp. 221-234), Fedor Vasilyuk has outlined a series of stages of *perezhivanie*: (1) Shock and stupefaction, fury; (2) searching; (3) Despair and suffering; (3) Residual shocks and re-organization; (5) Completion. In each of these phases, a different leading activity is needed to achieve the development and transformation into a new situation.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) studied the stages through which a person passes when undergoing an uncontrollable change in their life circumstances, particularly the death of a loved one: (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression and (5) acceptance. Kübler-Ross’s work is essentially a study of one particular type of *perezhivanie*: grieving. For Kübler-Ross, grieving is not simply an emotion, but an activity one carries out, together with others, in response to a crisis coming from the world outside your control – working through the meaning of this loss and reorienting your life projects now without the active presence of the loved one. Some contemporary psychologists extend Kübler-Ross’s work to understand other life-changing experiences, though in my view often unsuccessfully.

Vasilyuk uses the word ‘*perezhivanie*’ specifically to mean the process of working over. In his opinion, to successfully complete *perezhivanie* requires the aid of another person, be that a therapist, a parent or an actor. Freud also believed that everyone needed a psychoanalyst. Whether Freud and Vasilyuk are right or not, it seems that the aid of another person who is capable of objectifying and reflecting back the feelings of the person going through a *perezhivanie*, guiding them and making use of the resources of the culture to assist them in finding an accommodation with their new situation, is normally needed.

### Personality

What does this expansive concept of *perezhivanie* mean for the development of the personality, which is the subject Vygotsky is addressing in “The Problem of the Environment”? How does it help a person answer the question: who am I? If you were to write a biography of a person, wouldn’t you have to connect together the *perezhivaniya* of their life and demonstrate to the reader who the person was and how they came to be that person – the experiences they had and how they overcame them. And as a writer you would be unlikely to view the series of life crises, the experiencing and overcoming of which made the person who they were, to be simply events that happened to the person. As John Dewey notes, these experiences arise only in the course of a person trying to resolve some problem. *Perezhivaniya* are tied up with one’s orientation or commitment to various life-projects, and it is in the fate of these projects that psychological challenges arise. As Vasilyuk outlines, they could be value conflicts (like family/work commitments, or the betrayal of your values by respected leaders), or real clashes between valued projects (like when your parents go through an acrimonious divorce), blockages (like being disgraced in your career or losing your job), or simply the inability to formulate a life project.

These considerations could be summed up by saying that *perezhivaniya* are units of the personality or units of the formation of the personality, which is the same thing. The personality is the product of life’s *perezhivaniya*.

A. N. Leontyev remarked that *perezhivaniya* are “manifested as internal signals, by means of which are realized the personal sense of an event” and S. L. Rubenstein claimed: “*Perezhivaniya* become for the person that which proves to be personally significant for them.” They are the units or chapters of one’s autobiography, the episodes which stand out in the memory from the background of one’s life, and having been worked over by you and told and retold (to yourself or others), and ‘coded’ in language and images, become meaningful and together form the basis of who you are: not just what happened to you, but what you did, what you made of your life, in the context of the life-projects to which you were committed and which made the event life-changing and emotion-charged, how you worked over them and gave them meaning.
This is the sense in which Vygotsky said that *perezhivaniya* are units of a consciousness or of the personality as a whole.

**Unity**

As mentioned above, misunderstanding may arise not from translation, but from unfamiliarity with Marxist and Hegelian ideas, and in particular, the concept of *unity*. The issue of the meaning of unity arises in two aspects of the concept of *perezhivanie*.

The first is in the part of *The Problem of the Environment* where Vygotsky says (in a passage which is italicized):

> So, in a *perezhivanie* we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the *perezhivanie*. (1934, p. 342)

By “unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics,” Vygotsky obviously meant the relation, not the personality plus the situation. In Set Theoretical terms, the unity is the intersection not the union, those aspects or features which are both personal and environmental. For example, depending on the place of a job in a person’s life project, the loss of a job has a different significance. If a young backpacker loses their job, it is not the same as it is for someone’s whose job is their career. Vygotsky means that the *perezhivanie* is both subjective and objective; it is a very specific correlation between the development of the personality and affairs of the wider world which could be in themselves irrelevant to the subject’s psychology and unknown to them. The problem could be a tyrannical boss or changes in technology making a skill redundant, each of which has different implications. The oldest son in Vygotsky’s well-known case study, overcomes the problem of an alcoholic mother by transforming the objective situation by changing himself, making himself into the ‘senior man’ of the house.

Vygotsky saw *perezhivaniya* as *units* of the relation between the personality and the environment which arise in an analysis of the formation of the personality through one’s own activity as opposed to what one inherits in the genes.

There is a second respect in which *perezhivaniya* are said to be a unity; many writers note that *perezhivaniya* are “a unity of affect and intellect.” As Dewey explained above, a person’s activity, that is, their experiences, are each a whole, an original unity. *Perezhivanie* is not a combination of intellect and affect. On the contrary, it is only by reflection that we, as observers, can abstract from experiences the various psychological functions, for the purpose of our analysis. We need not stop at intellect and affect; we could also list attention, will, memory, and any other psychological function we care to name. In the first place (except perhaps in infancy when some psychological functions still subsist in a specific biological substrate), there is just the activity of the person as whole, not just emotion and intellect, but a whole person. Experiences are a whole. From this, we can abstract the separate functions.

For example, dough is made by adding water and flour, but dough is not a unity of flour and water. Milk is a unity of curds and whey, however, because curds and whey exist only as products extracted from milk, which comes whole from the cow.

So when we say that *perezhivaniya* are a “unity” of emotion and intellect and ..., we mean that *perezhivaniya* are wholes from which various psychological functions, themselves products of that whole, can be abstracted. So a person’s intellect develops, along with the development of their emotions and their will, as aspects of their whole personality, through the *perezhivaniya* of their life.

**Lived Experiences**

‘Lived experience’ differs from ‘experience’ in that rather than insisting on the correlation between situational features and personal features, it gives priority to the meaning or interpretation of the subject themself. The concept of ‘lived experience’ has gained prominence in resolving problems which have arisen in the professions of Social Work and Counseling, emphasizing as the focus the perception of the subject, irrespective of what may have happened objectively, that is to say, in the eyes of the rest of the world. So for example for a person who thought they were doing their job well and was devastated when they were sacked, ‘lived ex-
experience’ has a strong sense of how it feels to that person; that is what the therapist has to deal with. But this is going from one extreme – in which the sacking is taken simply as an objective event, whatever its significance for the person’s identity and self-esteem – to the other, subjectivist position, as a problem for a therapist, rather than a union delegate or employment agency. Perhaps the subject really was inadequate in the role and recovery entails acceptance of that fact, or perhaps on the contrary, the boss is a tyrant who needs to be brought before a court for his actions? Or perhaps the subject needs to reskill for a profession in a service industry? The oldest boy did not seek a therapist, he transformed his situation. Perezhivaniya are both objective and subjective, and success entails changing the social situation, either transforming the object, transforming the subject or both.

Perezhivanie is probably the most important concept in general psychology because it is a unit of development of the person as a whole, and all the other aspects of their personality must be grasped as arising from these perezhivaniya which have contributed to the self-formation of the person. But also, it is precisely through perezhivaniya that the subject matter of psychology joins up with the great societal forces active in the world beyond the immediate circle of the person’s social situation. This world is made and remade through people’s life projects, the projects to which people commit themselves and whose fate is to fashion their personality. So perezhivanie is a ‘hinge’ joining the social and psychological sciences.

Units

The idea of a unit of analysis is central to Vygotsky’s contribution to science, and yet its only elaboration is in Chapter One of Thinking and Speech. However, the roots of perezhivanie as a unit of analysis may be found in Vygotsky’s early interest in the theatre and in particular in the ideas of Constantin Stanislavskii (1936). Stanislavskii says that every performance must be broken down into units, each of which must have its own unique emotional content and motivation within the artistic objectives of the plot. Stanislavskii’s elaboration of these ‘units’ remind us of the ‘living-through’ and ‘repeating’ which we associate with perezhivanie. The actor must draw on their own life experiences to be able to reproduce the outward forms of perezhivaniya on stage and allow the audience to share them. Stanislavskii insists that each unit has to make sense in terms of the dramatic objective of the play as a whole. This surely suggests the idea of perezhivaniya as units of analysis of a really lived life.

Each perezhivaniya can be understood in itself, in the light of the objective circumstances contributing to the situation, and the relevant life project of the person as they were in the wake of previous perezhivaniya. They are units of analysis, the understanding of which provides the key to how specific changes in their personality and social position were achieved, and constitute a person’s Bildungsroman – to use Goethe’s term – the story of their development as a person.

This brings us to the fact that not only the person, but their capacity for perezhivanie also develops through ontogenesis.

Development

In The Problem of the Environment, Vygotsky illustrates the idea of perezhivanie by the case of three siblings coping or not with their single mother who is a drunk. The infant is indifferent to this situation, being too young to know; the middle child is traumatised; and the oldest child, a teenage boy, understands that he must become ‘the senior man’ in the family, makes an accelerated development and takes responsibility for looking after his siblings and his mother. That is, it is only the adolescent who is able to master the perezhivanie, and even in his case, without outside assistance, his own development may be damaged by his loss of childhood. In this way, Vygotsky showed how not just the social environment, but the significance of features of the environment for the subject and the subject’s capacity to process them, make up the essential units of analysis for understanding the development of the child.

Given that in the Anglosphere Vygotsky is mostly read by educators and child development people, not psychotherapists or anthropologists, it is not surprising that perezhivanie has been taken up within the discipline of child development. In Russia, on the other hand, it is mainly thanks to the work of Fedor Vasiliyuk in Psychotherapy that perezhivanie is widely used, and mainly in connection with adults. In fact, only adults can successfully complete the full range
of psychological phenomena associated with perezhivanie. But as I. A. Meshcheryakova remarks (n.d.):

According to the theory of Vygotsky, perezhivanie can be approached as any other mental function, which in ontogenesis is developed from the involuntary and direct forms to the highest forms, which have status of actions or activities. This approach offers possibilities for distinguishing the different genetic forms of perezhivanie, and also for the search for the cultural-historical means of mastery of perezhivaniya.

Ferholt, Nilsson and their colleagues have been able to observe perezhivaniya in very young children, a moment of calm in the midst of mayhem when the subject glimpses something new. Mike Cole has noted that in each case, the attention and intervention of experienced adult carers was necessary to achieve the ‘reflection’ required for the child to make this leap, confirming that it is instruction which leads development, and that culture and social interaction are always involved in the development of the higher mental functions, or as Vygotsky expressed it in the ‘general genetic law of cultural development’:

every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category. (Vygotsky 1931)

A child does not have a life-project. Having a life-project is part of the very meaning of being an adult. Development during childhood is characterized by a series of ‘leading activities’ which are arranged for the child by responsible adults as appropriate to their degree of maturity in the given culture. It is in relation to their leading activity that perezhivaniya occur, not life-projects. For a child it is in the critical periods of transition between developmental stages within an appropriate social situation of development that perezhivaniya occur.

This leaves us, however, with an imposing research problem: how does perezhivanie develop in the course of ontogenetic development from childhood through adolescence to adulthood? How frequently the advice of respected adults figures in our development during our teenage years! And yet as adults, unless severe trauma is involved, we are usually able to ‘process’ experiences ourselves, or with the support of family, and we consult professionals only in the event of our failure to overcome a crisis.

So perezhivaniya figure in our development at all stages of our life, but it changes in form and develops like all the higher mental functions. Perezhivanie develops in line with and in connection with the leading activities in a person’s life situation.

Reflection

It seems to be a general rule that perezhivanie is an activity which cannot be successfully completed without the support of others, be that a parent who listens to the child’s schoolyard story and tells them how to interpret the experience, the friends who enclose the bereaved person in loving support or the work colleagues who reorient their relations to a colleague who has made a breakthrough and give them the respect due to a more senior colleague, or the psychotherapist who talks it through with their patient, helping them to re-interpret a catastrophe and find meaning and/or solutions in an impossible situation.

Freud insisted on the importance of the therapist assisting the patient being able to confront their childhood traumas and repeat them as adults, reworking them and giving them new meaning as mature adults, fully cognizant of what was done to them.

Donald Winnicott was concerned with mothers and children who had become so dependent on one another that when the child finally detaches from physical reliance on the mother, either the mother becomes depressed and anxious or the child does, or both; or on the other hand, the mother-and-child actually fail to make that critical transition and remain codependent, or experience a range of pathologies. According to Winnicott, successful weaning is essential to future development of the child’s personality, as well as that of the parent.

Like Kübler-Ross’s study of dying, Winnicott’s study of weaning is a special case of perezhivanie: difficulties arising in the completion of a life-project and one’s relation to others entailed in the fate of life-projects. But in fact, these crises are manifested throughout life as
one passes through critical phases in the working-out of one’s life projects. These transitions are called *perezhivaniya*. Invariably, the resources for making these critical transitions are to be found in the culture, and often it is necessary to have the assistance of more experienced others to successfully navigate these transitions and utilize the possibilities for semiotic mediation, leading to *mastery* of the transition.

The concept of *perezhivanie* allows us to understand experiences which are not so dramatic, and what has been said above applies to those relatively minor joys and embarrassments which ‘stick in our minds’, still evoke an emotional response and are connected with our motivation, without becoming life-changing traumas. As Vygotsky remarked: “I proceeded from the idea that the well-developed forms … provide the key to the underdeveloped ones” (1928, p. 319).

**Critiques**

There have been critiques of Vygotsky’s concept of *perezhivanie* by Soviet colleagues. Lydia Bozhovich (2009) claimed that *perezhivanie* is a unit of the social situation of development – “the child’s ‘affective relationship’ to the environment.” This could lead to confusion, because social situation of development is itself a product of analysis in the study of child development. Secondly, claiming: “[Vygotsky] felt that the nature of experience in the final analysis is determined by how children understand the circumstances affecting them, that is, by *how developed their ability to generalize is,*” she mixes up the actual relation between the child and their social environment with a *conception* of that relationship formed by the child. In the same article, Bozhovich makes the correct point that *perezhivanie* being a unit, does not mean that it is ‘indivisible’, and cannot be subject to analysis.

In an undated article entitled “Study of the environment in the works of L. S. Vygotsky” (2005), A. N. Leontyev quoted Vygotsky: “The situation will influence the child in different ways depending on how well the child understands its sense and meaning,” which he glosses as ‘*perezhivanie* itself is determined by understanding, that is, by consciousness. ... the effect of the environment depends on the child’s degree of comprehension of the environment.” Leontyev thus interprets Vygotsky as viewing *perezhivanie* as primarily an intellectual process, one of a subject comprehending their social situation. But this turns Vygotsky’s idea upside down: first of all the subject has a *perezhivanie*, and this determines their whole development and response to the situation, whether or not they comprehend it. In the case of the most developed *perezhivaniya*, an adult *will* gain an understanding of their experience, but this is only thanks to later analysis of the *perezhivanie*. But in the first place it is a whole.

**Conclusion**

Once our attention is drawn to the meaning of *perezhivanie* and the idea that *perezhivaniya* are the units of our autobiography, so to speak, the series of crises through which we have constructed our life and personality, then two things follow.

Firstly, we should revisit the literature, philosophy and psychology available to us as English speakers where we can now recognize that these same issues are being dealt with. Vygotsky’s Psychology, with its view of the human being as the ongoing product of phylogenesis, cultural-historical development and ontogenesis, the method of analysis by units and the experimental-genetic methodology of his psychological research, the conception of the sign mediation of all human interactions – these resources can be mobilized for a critical re-appropriation of a wide range of contemporary psychological theory and practice.

Secondly, the problem of the development of *perezhivanie* in ontogenesis is posed for us, presently as an unsolved, indeed unasked question. And how important this question is for the problem of the development of our young people! What are the conditions for the successful completion of *perezhivaniya*; under what conditions is a person able to achieve ‘closure’, as they say nowadays? Does the concept of *perezhivanie* suggest how CHAT scholars could intervene in contemporary discussions about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the growing problems of domestic violence and youth suicide?

How much of the response to these questions can be found in the scientific literature of our Russian colleagues? How can their knowledge, accumulated over the 80 years since Vygotsky’s death, be made available for English-speakers?
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Vygotsky and Vasilyuk on *Perezhivanie*: Two Notions and One Word*

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In this paper I discuss the difference between Vygotsky’s and Vasilyuk’s uses of the term *perezhivanie*. Arguably, this difference may have contributed to some of the current ambiguity regarding the notion of *perezhivanie* in cultural psychology. In short, I will propose that Vasilyuk’s *perezhivanie* can be understood as a special type of activity, while Vygotsky’s *perezhivanie* can be better understood as a special type of meaning. I will also propose that Vasilyuk’s *perezhivanie* consists primarily of the semiotic transformation of Vygotsky’s *perezhivanie*. After offering conceptual clarifications and examples based on Vygotsky’s and Vasilyuk’s writings, I will illustrate these two notions of *perezhivanie* with a case of a teacher faced with pupils’ disruptions in class. In this illustrative case, my analysis of the semiotic transformation of Vygotsky’s *perezhivanie* during Vasilyuk’s *perezhivanie* is based on the semiotic theory of Greimas.

1. Experiencing as an Active Struggle: Vasilyuk’s *Perezhivanie*

In William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, the tyrant king of Scotland cruelly kills Macduff’s whole household, including his wife, children and servants. Macduff learns about the murders through the words of his cousin, Ross, in the presence of Malcolm, the legitimate heir to the crown:

Ross: Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes / Savagely slaughter’d: to relate the manner, / Were, on the quarry of these murder’d deer, / To add the death of you (…)

Macduff: My children too?

Ross: Wife, children, servants, all / That could be found.

Macduff: And I must be from thence! / My wife kill’d too?

Ross: I have said (…)

Macduff: He has no children. All my pretty ones? / Did you say all? O hell-kite! All? / What, all my pretty chickens and their dam / At one fell swoop?

Malcolm: Dispute it like a man.

Macduff: I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man.

(*The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act IV, Sect. 3 [Shakespeare, 1907, p. 90])

This excerpt from *The Tragedy of Macbeth* beautifully illustrates the kind of phenomenon that led Fyodor Vasilyuk to propose the incorporation of a new type of activity into the theoretical and empirical domain of Activity Theory. According to Vasilyuk (1984/1988), this psychological tradition had been mainly focused either on object-oriented practical activity or on cognitive activity understood as mental reflection. By mental reflection, Vasilyuk means the production of mental facts as “abstracted from the individual’s volitional sphere” (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 37, footnote). In other words, the production of what is nowadays commonly understood as conceptual knowledge. Vasilyuk, who was mainly concerned with psychotherapy, noted that some situations require a type of work other than practical or cognitive work. Macduff, for example, when
faced with the murder of his family, engages in cognitive work to understand what happened and reaches his conclusion: “What, all my pretty chickens and their dam / At one fell swoop?” This cognitive work, however, is of course useless to solve his situation. Then, Malcolm suggests that he undertake a practical activity, that is, that he kill the tyrant Macbeth: “Dispute it like a man.” Macduff accepts (“I shall do so”), but he knows that this will also be useless to fix his situation, since no practical activity can bring his family back. His situation requires him to undertake another type of work: “But I also must feel it as a man.” This work, which Macduff calls “feeling it as a man,” is what Vasilyuk (1988) calls perezhivanie.

In the English version of Vasilyuk’s (1988) book, perezhivanie is translated as experiencing. The problematic translation of the Russian word perezhivanie has been widely noted and discussed by western scholars. I agree that this problem exists. However, there is a second terminological problem in both the words perezhivanie and experiencing, emphatically worked out by Vasilyuk, which has received much less attention in the literature and, to my mind, has even more problematic implications, namely, the distinction between Vasilyuk’s use of experiencing/perezhivanie and the traditional meanings of these terms in psychology and everyday speech.

According to Vasilyuk (1988, p. 23-24), in traditional psychological approaches, experiencing is mainly referred to as the subjective contemplation of the external world; that is, the world presents itself to the subject, with its own force, and the subject is just affected by it, passively and effortlessly. In contrast, Vasilyuk (1988) proposes using the term experiencing in quite a different way, to refer to the active work that people conduct to overcome psychological states of impossibility. To distinguish between these two meanings, Vasilyuk talks of experiencing-as-contemplation, to refer to the traditional usage of the word, and experiencing-as-activity, to refer to the kind of phenomenon he aims to study (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 25). Throughout the book, however, he uses just experiencing to refer to experiencing-as-activity, and when he refers to experiencing-as-contemplation he indicates it with an asterisk (“experiencing*”) (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 26, footnote). In my opinion, the term experiencing-as-activity is also problematic, since experiencing-as-contemplation could also be regarded as a kind of activity, or at least, as Vasilyuk himself suggests later in the book, as a part or aspect of an activity (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 201). Thus, I propose that a more unambiguous name might be experiencing-as-struggle, which is the term I will use in this paper to refer to Vasilyuk’s perezhivanie/experiencing.

In short, the phenomenon under consideration can be described as follows: Imagine a person faced with a situation that causes her strong pain, suffering, and psychological disruption, who cannot do anything, whether practical or cognitive, to resolve the existential aspects of this situation. Experiencing-as-struggle is the work that, faced with an existentially impossible situation, the person conducts in order to regain psychological equilibrium (Vasilyuk, 1988, pp. 18-19; see also p. 32). According to Vasilyuk (1988, p. 28), this same phenomenon had already been studied in other psychological traditions, under the names psychological defense or coping.

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1 Specifically, Vasilyuk suggests the hypothesis that experiencing-as-contemplation is one step of experiencing-as-activity; thus, especially in certain types of experiencing-as-activity, the subject needs to consciously and subjectively contemplate how the situation affects her in order to begin to conduct the active work of experiencing-as-activity: “These propositions enable one to advance the hypothesis that experiencing is multilevel in structure (...) In each particular instance of the “experiencing” activity, the levels of consciousness detailed above come together for its realization into a functional unity unique to each instance, in which any one level may assume the leading role. In the passage quoted earlier (...) the experiencing activity was mainly on the unconscious level (“the secret work of the soul”), with some active participation by the level of direct experiencing* (“the desire for some change in life, for freedom from something, and a sense of wanting to set off for somewhere”). (...) In creative resolution of what are known as “problem/conflict” situations, the processes of the reflective level of consciousness are particularly important” (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 201).

2 See also the Foreword to the English edition.
Thus, the first condition for experiencing-as-struggle is facing a situation of impossibility, that is, what Vasilyuk calls a critical situation (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 32). As examples of critical situations, the author talks of the death of a loved one (p. 28), the situation of political prisoners in the Schlüsselburg fortress, forced to do meaningless physical work (p. 27), or the situation of Raskolnikov after his crime in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (Chapter 3). Arguably, the situation faced by Macduff would be a critical situation too.

2. The Semiotic Mediation of Experiencing-as-Struggle: Vygotsky’s *Perezhivanie*

Basing himself on Vygotsky’s main ideas, Vasilyuk (1988, pp. 175-176) assumes that experiencing-as-struggle is semiotically mediated, including the trigger of the whole process, that is, the critical situation. Thus, Vasilyuk (1988) argues that a situation is critical only to the degree that the subject sees the situation as such:

> The actual character of a psychological situation is, in the last count, determined by the “internal state” created. Although a situation may be objectively insoluble, so long as the individual retains a belief in its solubility, (...) that situation has not become critical in the exact sense of the term. Conversely, even if the situation is from the viewpoint of an outside observer entirely resolvable, so soon as the individual acquires a conviction of its being impossible the situation then becomes a critical one, with all its attendant consequences. (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 39)

This is exactly Vygotsky’s point of departure in a lecture known as *The Problem of the Environment* (Vygotsky, 1994a), in which he examines the influence of environment on the child. His main argument is that this influence is not fully determined by the objective conditions of the situation, but rather, more than anything, by the meaning that the situation has for the child:

> The crux of the matter is that whatever the situation, its influence depends not only on the nature of the situation itself, but also on the extent of the child’s understanding and awareness of the situation. (Vygotsky, 1994a, pp. 343-344)

In *The Problem of the Environment*, Vygotsky (1994a) is mainly concerned with the influence of environment on children’s ontogenetic development. Accordingly, he offers several examples of children of different ages who, faced with violent behavior by their mother (p. 340), the death of a family member, a dangerous illness of the mother, or a parental separation (p. 343), understand their situations very differently and, consequently, are affected very differently by them. Vygotsky establishes a relationship between these observations and his previous studies on the development of word meaning, offering the general argument that a single situation affects children of different ages differently because the influence that the environment exerts upon the child is determined by the meaning that the child forms for her situation, and *children of different ages form word meanings in qualitatively different ways*:

> One and the same event occurring at different ages of the child, is reflected in his consciousness in a completely different manner and has an entirely different meaning for the child. In connection with this, a quite complicated concept, but one which is very important for the understanding of how environment influences development, is of some interest. The concept has this connection because it represents the meaning of our words. (...) a child at different stages of his development does not generalize to the same extent, and consequently, he interprets and imagines the surrounding reality and environment in a different way. Consequently, the development of thinking in children in itself, the development of generalization in children in itself, is also connected with the way the environment influences children. So, as time goes by, the child begins to understand more and more. Now he is
able to understand the things he could not understand earlier. Does this mean that now some events occurring in the family will affect the child in a different way? Yes. (...) This means that the development of thinking in children in itself, the meaning of children’s words, is what determines the new relationship which can exist between the environment and the different developmental processes. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 345-346).

In a word, the crucial issue here for Vygotsky is meaning, in the same general terms in which he considered meaning formation in his ontogenetic research (Vygotsky, 1987), that is, briefly, that when incorporated in signs (especially words), meaning formation mediates psychological processes and transforms them structurally (Vygotsky, 1994b). This is indeed the same general scheme also assumed by Vasilyuk (1988, p. 176). However, both Vasilyuk and Vygotsky note that the meanings mediating how a given situation affects the subject have important peculiarities. Perhaps to highlight these peculiarities, Vygotsky used a special term to refer to this type of meaning: perezhivanie.

The perezhivanie arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child. Therefore, it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child’s perezhivanie (Vygotsky, 1994a, pp. 339-340).

In the English translation of The Problem of the Environment (Vygotsky, 1994a), the term perezhivanie was translated as emotional experience. In my opinion, this translation is especially misleading and that is why in the preceding excerpt from that work, as well as in those that follow, I have replaced the translation emotional experience with the original Russian word perezhivanie.

In my view, it is very improbable that when Vasilyuk wrote The Psychology of Experiencing he knew of the usage that Vygotsky had given to the term perezhivanie in The Problem of the Environment. Vasilyuk makes no mention of it, although he largely grounds his work on Vygotsky’s, and writes that:

the category “experiencing” is not something we took up ready-made from outside the activity theory, from some other theory; what we have tried to do is rather to take the extra-scientific, intuitively comprehended idea of experiencing and “facet” it, using as tools the concepts and categories of the activity theory. (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 20)

Thus, I am inclined to think that the fact that Vasilyuk and Vygotsky both use the term perezhivanie is just a coincidence. This coincidence, as I have tried to suggest, is not due to the fact that they were both naming the same phenomenon; however, it is not entirely fortuitous either, since they were naming two different but related phenomena. More specifically, Vasilyuk was naming a type of activity, while Vygotsky was naming the type of meaning that mediates that type of activity. In other words, in my understanding, Vygotsky’s perezhivanie semiotically mediates Vasilyuk’s experiencing-as-struggle. From this view, and for terminological clarity, in the rest of this paper, I will use the term perezhivanie in Vygotsky’s sense only, that is, to refer to the specific type of meaning that mediates activities of experiencing-as-struggle.  

3 I am not assuming here that this type of meaning only mediates experiencing-as-struggle; in fact, I assume that meanings of this kind always mediate, at a more or less conscious level, all types of activities.
3. The Nature of Perezhivanie As a Type of Meaning

I said in the last section that both Vasilyuk and Vygotsky noted that the type of meaning that mediates how a situation affects the subject – what I will henceforth call perezhivanie – has certain peculiarities. The most important is that perezhivanie is not the meaning that one or another aspect of the situation has for the subject, but rather the meaning the subject forms for the situation as a whole, including all relevant aspects of the external situation and all relevant aspects of the subject facing that situation. In Vygotsky’s words:

A perezhivanie is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced – a perezhivanie is always related to something which is found outside the person – and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e., all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie; (...) So, in (a perezhivanie we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in perezhivanie. (Vygotsky, 1994a, p. 342)

Vasilyuk (1988) makes essentially the same point when he stresses that experiencing-as-struggle is not about the production of what is nowadays understood as conceptual knowledge (the product of cognitive activity) but rather the meaning of the whole situation, approachable through the opposition meaningfulness-meaninglessness:

The third antithesis, meaningfulness-meaninglessness, has quite a different origin. Its source is in the concept of the “meaning-forming motive”. Only when a subject’s activity, and the course of events in general, is proceeding in a direction tending towards realization of his meaning-forming motives, will the situation have meaning (be meaningful). If things are proceeding otherwise the situation becomes meaningless. (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 31, footnote)

Vasilyuk connects what I am calling perezhivanie, that is, the meaning that mediates experiencing-as-struggle, to what others have called Gestalt (p. 191) or schematism (pp. 176-177) (the latter being the term Vasilyuk borrows from Mamardashvili, Solovyov and Shyryov to refer to this type of meaning in the last chapter of his book). Besides the holistic nature of perezhivanie, Vasilyuk also notes that this type of meaning is learned in ways different from formal scientific knowledge (that is, conceptual knowledge), and he metaphorically describes the way it is learned as “entering into” (p. 177). Actually, this type of meaning is not strange to western psychology, and it has been observed and studied through many different approaches under several different names, although rarely in relation to the processes that I am calling experiencing-as-struggle (one exception is Teasdale’s (1993) implicational meaning). Some names which have been used to refer essentially to the same type of meaning, although within very different psychological approaches and in relation to different purposes and interests, are, for example, Schön’s (1983) framing in relation to professional action, Arnold’s (1960) and Lazarus’s (2006) appraisal in relation to emotion (see also Clarà, 2015), Johnson-Laird’s (1983) mental model in relation to reasoning, or what I have called elsewhere situational representation (Clarà, 2014) in relation to teaching practice. In these notions, the holistic nature of this type of meaning, the difficulty of putting it into words, its often unconscious functioning, and its close relationship to emotion and life, are recurrently observed.

(Clarà, 2014, 2015a). However, since Vygotsky proposes the term perezhivanie in relation to critical situations, here I will use the term perezhivanie specifically as a semiotic mediator of experiencing-as-struggle.
4. The Semiotic Transformation of \textit{Perezhivanie} in \textit{Experiencing-as-Struggle}

Thus far, I have differentiated between experiencing-as-struggle, which was the type of activity studied by Vasilyuk (1988), and \textit{perezhivanie}, understood as the type of meaning that mediates this specific type of activity, which I argue was Vygotsky’s (1994a) focus. However, so far I have considered \textit{perezhivanie} only at the very start of the process of experiencing-as-struggle, that is, only as determining whether a given situation is critical or not. Now we are ready to more fully consider the specific kind of work a subject must conduct in experiencing-as-struggle. In short, this work is primarily that of the semiotic transformation of the \textit{perezhivanie}.

One can only say that in a situation of impossibility (meaninglessness) a person is faced with a “problem of meaning” in one form or another – not as this is spoken of by A.N. Leontiev in his activity-theory writings, where the task is to clothe in significations a meaning which is objectively present in the individual’s life but not yet clear to his consciousness – here the problem is of arriving at meaningfulness, of seeking out sources of meaning, of “exploiting” these, of actively extracting meaning from them, etc. – in short, of \textit{producing} meaning. It is this general idea of \textit{producing meaning} which enables us to speak of experiencing as of a \textit{productive} process, as of a special kind of \textit{work}. (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 33)

This deserves further comment, since both Vygotsky’s and Vasilyuk’s notions of \textit{perezhivanie} are usually interpreted by western literature as primarily referring to emotional phenomena. I have already argued that Vygotsky is talking about meaning when introducing the term \textit{perezhivanie}, but perhaps it was not clear until now that Vasilyuk’s experiencing-as-struggle is also primarily about meaning. It is absolutely true that when experiencing-as-struggle is successful the subject faces emotional transformations, but the work the subject must conduct in this type of activity is, according to Vasilyuk (1988), primarily semiotic:

but to offset the ingrained association or even equation of the words “emotion” and “experiencing”, still widely current in psychological literature, it must be especially stressed that emotion has no sole right to the starring role in the actualization of experiencing. The main part may be played by perception (...), and by thinking (...), and by attention (...), and by other mental “functions”. (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 36)

Consider first the example of experiencing-as-struggle successfully conducted by the political prisoners in the Schlüsselburg fortress, as mentioned by Vasilyuk in relation to an analysis conducted by Leontiev (Vasilyuk, 1988, p. 27). The prison authorities obliged them to move earth from one place to another for no reason. In the beginning of the process, the situation was understood by the prisoners as meaningless, as a kind of torture, not only physical but also psychological; this was their \textit{perezhivanie} at the beginning. The product of their experiencing-as-struggle was a complete transformation of this \textit{perezhivanie}: they came to understand the pointless work as training the authorities were giving them as a present to keep up the physical and moral strength they would later need to fight autocracy. Of course, this implies an emotional transformation, but the work that experiencing-as-struggle basically consists of is a work of semiotic transformation of \textit{perezhivanie}. Another example, carefully analyzed by Vasilyuk (1988), is the successful experiencing-as-struggle carried out by Raskolnikov in \textit{Crime and Punishment}. Here, again, the crucial work conducted by Raskolnikov is the semiotic transformation of an initial \textit{perezhivanie}, after his crime, full of internal contradictions and based on a stance of superiority and difference in relation to others, into a new \textit{perezhivanie} based on Christian ideas of fault-repentance-redemption-bliss:

First of all it was vital for him to re-think the meaning of his crime in terms of the new value system. Confessing to the crime was only the first, outward step towards such a re-thinking (...) thus entering into the schematism not by way of bliss this
time, but by way of fault admitted, at the same time disassociating himself from the crime, de-identifying himself with it (“...it was the devil killed the old lady, not I”) (Vasilyuk, 1988, pp. 191-192)

Thus, Vasilyuk’s analysis shows that, although a deep emotional transformation occurs in Raskolnikov, the main work he conducts in his experiencing-as-struggle is that of the semiotic transformation of his perezhivanie, that is, the transformation of the prism through which he saw and understood his situation.

5. An Empirical Illustration

In this section I will try to illustrate a little bit more carefully the semiotic transformation of perezhivanie in a case of experiencing-as-struggle performed by a teacher I will call Carla. When I interviewed her, Carla was 31 years old and worked as a teacher at a school located in a middle-class neighborhood in the Barcelona metropolitan area. Carla reported a process of experiencing-as-struggle related to a situation of continuous disruption in her class. Clearly, at an initial point, Carla saw this situation as critical, in the sense used by Vasilyuk, and it caused strong emotional disruption for her:

I think it was (a, I mean) a whole accumulation of things, like feeling bad at work, thinking “what am I doing?”, and learning a bit about how to deal with what was going on in class, you know? Things that were really hard, where you think “Now what am I going to do? The child is saying no, right? I’m not any sort of authority figure for this person, so what am I going to do?” […] That made me, it made me feel a bit anxious, encountering things that made me think, “OK, maybe things aren’t going so well” […] Encountering children who would knock my pencils on the floor, you know? “I’m not going to do what you say, period.” Right? Or I’d have situations where, I don’t know, they would say, “I’m getting up,” and I would say, “Well, now we’re going to… let’s sit down,” you know? Now it’s all under control, they would get up and they would say, “No. We’re not going to sit down just because you say so,” you know? Students who, maybe, in the middle of class had punched the wall and left a gaping hole in it, right?

In the interview, Carla explained in more detail one of these incidents and how she understood and conceived of the incident in that initial moment of her process. This makes it possible to examine Carla’s perezhivanie at the start of her experiencing-as-struggle.

It was because I said something like, “You have to do your homework” or “You haven’t done your homework. Give me your notebook,” and he… he got really angry and hit the wall. Then, honestly, I felt really bad, really guilty, also, for everything that was going on, you know? And I kept thinking, “I didn’t handle that well,” you know? “I didn’t handle that well and that’s why the child hit the wall.” And… well, basically, that. I feel… I usually feel… or rather, at that point, I used to feel more of that, more guilt, saying “it’s my fault,” or “it’s because I didn’t handle it well.” I don’t know how to deal with these attitudes, and that’s why these things happen, right? Or “Maybe they didn’t do their homework because I wasn’t clear enough” or “Maybe they don’t do their homework…”, that kind of thing, you know? That… went on every day, right? It really did happen a lot. “He didn’t do his homework. Why didn’t he do his homework? Maybe I have to talk more with his parents. Maybe it’s my fault.” And in that sense, you feel guilty, like you don’t know how to deal with the situation, like you’re not doing a good job, or, at least, that’s how I feel, like I’m not doing a good job, I’m not handling it well, I don’t know how to do it. Those are the kinds of messages that… more in the first part.
In order to analyze Carla’s *perezhivanie*, I will use Greimas’s semiotic theory. I do not have space here to adequately introduce this theoretical and analytical approach (see, for example: Greimas, 1983; Greimas, 1989; Greimas & Rastier, 1968; Greimas & Fontanille, 1992) or to explain the specific analytical procedures I used (for a detailed analysis protocol, see Clarà [2015b]). Suffice it here to say that Greimas conceives of meaning at different levels of depth: discourse, made of words, is the surface of meaning, while the deepest level of meaning consists of a set of oppositions between pure semes. In my view, Greimas’s theory and observations are very consistent with Vygotsky’s, especially with those reported in Chapter 7 of *Thinking and Speech*, that is, that at deeper levels of meaning, discourse becomes progressively abbreviated, and the literal meaning of the words dilutes in favor of sense (Vygotsky, 1987). Greimas further articulates these ideas, and also does so methodologically. Basically, Greimas establishes three main levels of depth to study meaning: at the surface lies discourse; at the deepest level, there is an opposition of semes he calls the Constitutional Model; and in the middle, the semes of the Constitutional Model are articulated by anthropomorphic actants, structurally related to each other, in what he calls the Modal Arrangement. This will allow us to see at which level of meaning the transformations of Carla’s *perezhivanie* occur in her experiencing-as-struggle.

First, however, we have to describe her *perezhivanie* in the beginning of the process. Basically, at the level of the modal arrangement, we see in her *perezhivanie* a contradiction between Carla’s duty and her lack of ability. In her view, this contradiction causes an initial disruptive behavior by the child, which implies a new duty for Carla, which, in turn, enters into a new contradiction with her lack of ability. This new contradiction causes a second, even more disruptive behavior by the child, and so on. The basic modal arrangement of Carla’s *perezhivanie*, at the start of the process, could be represented as follows:

Carla’s *having to do* vs Carla’s *not knowing how to do*

> Child’s *doing [disruption]* > Carla’s *having to do* vs Carla’s *not knowing how to do*

> Child’s *doing [disruption]*

etc.

If we go deeper into Carla’s *perezhivanie*, at the level of the constitutional model, we can see a basic opposition between one nucleus formed by the semes /instruction + knowledge + proximity/, mainly articulated by Carla’s duty, and another nucleus formed by the semes /insubordination + ignorance + distance/, articulated by the child’s doing and Carla’s lack of ability. Since Carla’s duty is unfulfilled, the situation is seen by Carla as one of insubordination, ignorance and distance. Thus, the main opposition in the constitutional model of Carla’s *perezhivanie* at the start of her experiencing-as-struggle can be represented as:

/instruction + knowledge + proximity/ vs /insubordination + ignorance + distance/4

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4 According to Greimas, the generative opposition in the constitutional model emerges as a scission of a kind of semantic magma that he calls *thymic mass*. When this scission occurs, there is also a scission of the phoria, so one of the semic nuclei becomes euphoric (in this case, /instruction+knowledge+proximity/), and the other one dysphoric (in this case, /insubordination+ignorance+distance/) (Greimas & Fontanille, 1992). To adequately represent this system of semic oppositions, Greimas considers, for each opposition, two more semic nuclei: the contraries of each nucleus of the generative opposition, so that the contrary of each nucleus implies the opposite of that nucleus. This set of four interrelated semic nuclei is represented by Greimas in what he calls a *semiotic square* (see Greimas & Rastier, 1968). In our case, the contrary nuclei would be /no insubordination+no ignorance+no distance/ at the euphoric deixis, and /no instruction+no knowledge+no proximity/ at the dysphoric deixis. However, for the purposes of this paper, and for the sake of simplicity in the exposition, it will be enough here to work with the generative opposition only.
From this situation of impossibility, Carla successfully conducted an activity of experiencing-as-struggle that led her to regain emotional stability and tranquility regarding the situation. In the following excerpt, she reports this emotional re-equilibrium and also shows how she transformed her perezhivanie during her experiencing-as-struggle:

Yes, I think something has changed. Now I think more about… about alright, what’s going on here? Uh. Maybe I’m not to blame, you know? Maybe he just has this need. Or, alright, why doesn’t he do his homework? Well, why? Let’s look at why he isn’t doing his homework. Let’s look at what’s going on with this child. When he gets home, what kind of environment does he have, you know? And in that sense, I’m more relaxed, in the sense that, well, I am there for him, I am by his side, and this… I can’t control whether or not the children do their homework. That’s one thing, right? In the sense that I cannot control that. I control what they do here, not what they do out of school. And when there are situations like this, more complicated ones, when a student, well… I think I’m calmer than I used to be, I think I’m learning, you know? I’m calmer, I’m more relaxed, I try to listen to the student. [...] Why did this child do that, you know? What is he trying to tell me? Whereas before it was all a bit… uh… different. I didn’t approach things like that, asking “Why is he doing this to me? Or why…” or “What is he trying to tell me?” I never used to even think about that aspect. Now I’m working on it. Now I at least think about it and say “Let’s go talk.” And in that sense, I feel better, much stronger when I come here, and it’s OK, whatever happens in class, I might or might not do a great job. But I have… I have some strength in this sense, right? To look at the child and say “OK, here (I am). You can tell me what’s going on with you, and I’ll respect it.”

Consider the new perezhivanie of Carla, as reported in this excerpt. Importantly, the child’s disruption is no longer seen as insubordination, but rather as the child’s expression of out-of-school problems. More importantly, the disruption is now seen as the child’s way of telling Carla something, such that the disruption is now seen as an act of proximity (rather than distance) that deserves respectful consideration by Carla. In short, the whole constitutional model of Carla’s perezhivanie has been replaced. The new constitutional model is made up of two basic oppositions and can be represented as follows:

| /well-being/                          | vs | /upset/     |
| /expression + consideration/          | vs | /repression + omission/ |

Thus, the situation, through the prism of the new perezhivanie, is at once a situation of upset and one of expression and consideration: the child’s disruption is the expression of the child’s being upset, and this expression is respectfully listened to by Carla. The child’s being upset, on the other hand, has nothing to do with Carla; it is caused by out-of-school conditions, which are seen as impossible for Carla to control, and, therefore, as falling beyond her duty as a teacher. This articulation of the constitutional model in the new perezhivanie can be represented, at the level of the modal arrangement, as follows:

Child’s out-of-school context

> [Child’s doing (disruption) = Child’s doing (expression)] >

| Carla’s doing (listening) = Carla’s having to do |
Note that, at the level of the modal arrangement, the contradictions have disappeared; Carla’s
duty is no longer equated with quashing children’s disruptions, but rather with respectfully listen-
ting to the children’s expressions as signified by these disruptions. Moreover, the feelings of
being upset that these disruptions express are no longer caused, actively or passively, by Carla,
but rather by something beyond her possibilities and duty as a teacher.

Thus, Carla’s case illustrates and provides further support for the idea that experiencing-as-
struggle consists primarily of the semiotic transformation of the \textit{perezhivanie}. In this case, spe-
cifically, this transformation consisted of the replacement of the semic nuclei at the constitutio-
onal level and the elimination of contradictions at the modal arrangement level of Carla’s
\textit{perezhivanie}.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to make four main points. First, Vasilyuk’s work on \textit{perezhivanie} is not
the continuation or development of Vygotsky’s initial work on \textit{perezhivanie}. Instead, Vasilyuk
and Vygotsky both use this term to refer to different (albeit related) phenomena. Vasilyuk is
referring to a special type of activity that I have proposed calling experiencing-as-struggle,
while Vygotsky is referring to a special type of meaning that mediates experiencing-as-struggle.
Second, \textit{perezhivanie} understood as a type of activity is not the same as having an experience or
experiencing in the traditional sense; that is, there is a sharp difference between experiencing-
as-struggle (Vasilyuk’s \textit{perezhivanie}) and experiencing-as-contemplation. Third, in both
Vygotsky and Vasilyuk, \textit{perezhivanie} is primarily about meaning: in Vygotsky it is a special
type of meaning; in Vasilyuk it is a special type of activity mainly consisting of the transfor-
mation and production of the type of meaning Vygotsky calls \textit{perezhivanie}. This type of mean-
ing, however, has important peculiarities, among them its holistic nature and its close relation to
emotional phenomena. Finally, I have also indirectly suggested that \textit{perezhivanie} and its semiot-
ic transformation in experiencing-as-struggle can be studied with the help of Greimás’s theoreti-
cal and methodological instrumentalities. My hope is that these four points can contribute to the
clarification of the notions of \textit{perezhivanie} and facilitate scientific inquiry into them.

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Perezhivaniya as a means of creating the aesthetic form of consciousness

Beth Ferholt and Monica Nilsson

Until recently scholars have placed the emergence of perezhivaniya in the very latest stages of childhood or in adolescence. This article will clarify the meaning of the term perezhivanie by describing and creating a working definition of perezhivaniya across the life span. We will also delineate stages of perezhivaniya. We take into account the work of a range of scholars and artists whose studies of the properties of perezhivaniya have converged, often without their using, or possibly even being aware of, the term perezhivanie. We derive our claims from empirical material from a Swedish preschool and from a playworld that took place in an elementary school in the United States.

“How do moments add up to lives?” – Jay Lemke, 2000, p. 273

What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, “Life stand still here”; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) – this was the nature of a revelation. – Lilly Briscoe in To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf, 1927, p. 240-1

Defining quality, descriptions and diagrams that portray perezhivaniya

Perezhivanie is a concept that addresses Lemke’s question and Woolf’s response. It is similar to a certain type of viewing device for seeing three dimensional photographs. The two dimensional photographs sit side by side, a fixed distance apart. It is only when you adjust the viewer so that your eyes are just the right distance from the photos that you can see both flat pictures at once and you find yourself back in the room with your dead friends and relatives – for a second time. A perezhivanie doubles back on itself through a series of stages that spiral back over themselves in such a way that, when the same stage, still flat but at another point in time, is placed over the first, just so, your life becomes three dimensional again.

Blunden (2015) summarizes this defining quality of a perezhivanie in this way: “a perezhivanie is both an experience (in the sense in which Dewey explained) and the ‘working over’ of it.” Essential to this defining quality of a perezhivanie is that there is not just a revisiting of an experience, but that the first time the experience takes place in the march of time forward from birth to death, while the ‘working over’ does not take place in a linear time that moves from past to present to future. This is why Mrs. Ramsay does not say, “Stand still here,” but rather, “Life stand still here,” which is a paradox, as life is exactly that which does not stand still.

By ‘saying’ “Life stand still here,” Mrs. Ramsay presents the frame which creates a paradox by delineating two times, and it is in this way she makes of the moment something permanent. Lily, a painter, tells us that she tries to do just this in her artistic practice. A perezhivanie is, in this sense, the frame that makes life like art.

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A *perezhivanie* is not the frame of birth and dying that delineates life, and thus allows a life to become art for people who are still alive, but rather the frame that gives us the perfect distance from which to view the two, two-dimensional slides. Without the paradox there could be no communication, change or humor (no “meaning of life,” for Lilly / Woolf). Vygotsky writes: “The potential for free action that we find associated with the emergence of human consciousness is closely connected with imagination, with the unique psychological set of consciousness vis-à-vis reality that is manifested in imagination” (1987, p. 349). What is of interest in this quote is Vygotsky’s assertion that the relationship between two things that are not of the same logical type is closely connected to the potential for free action, and thus to consciousness.

As Gunilla Lindqvist (1995) explains:

> Vygotsky’s view of the dynamic structure of consciousness corresponds with the aesthetic form of art. In play, a meeting between the individual’s internal and external environment takes place in a creative interpretation process, the imaginary process, in which children express their imagination in action. Play reflects the aesthetic form of consciousness. (1995, p. 40)

Leaving aside Lindqvist’s focus on play, this argument allows us to describe a *perezhivanie*, described above as “the frame that makes life like art,” as an action: a means of creating the aesthetic form of consciousness.

An in depth discussion of aesthetics and *perezhivaniya* is required by this description. Vivian Sobchack (1992, 2004) on film, specifically on Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962), and Vygotsky (1971) on literary analysis, provide a start. Sobchack describes the “lived momentum” (1992, 2004) of film, which is the illusion of time flowing, which we, the audience, fall into because we are aware of the disjointed still photographs that film actually is. Sobchack’s (1992) argument is that film shows us the frame through which it is created and that it is our knowledge of this frame, our knowledge that the movement we experience is just an illusion, that makes this illusion convincing. She explains that film designates a space by drawing attention to the frame of this space and that we, the viewers, then fall into this space and, in falling, glimpse the future.

The reason that film allows us to glimpse the future is that there is a connection between filmic time and ‘real’ time: “The images of a film exist in the world as a temporal flow, within finitude and situation. Indeed, the fascination of the film is that it does not transcend our lived-experience of temporality, but rather that it seems to partake of it, to share it” (1992, p. 60). We inhabit the live space of film, and in our new habitat we feel so at home in time that the fantastic we experience through film lives on in our memories, as a part of our pasts, and in this way (becomes the figures within the picture to the wallpaper of our ‘real’ lives (Bateson, 1972), or vice versa, and thus) shapes both our present and our future.

Sobchack (2004) describes *La Jetée* (1962), a film that is composed almost entirely of still photographs, as a film about film. She makes use of the central moment in *La Jetée*, the one moment that is not a still photograph, when the woman opens her eyes, looks at the camera and blinks, to add to her description of film as always being in the act of becoming and therefore being habitable. “One can wonder what reality a photograph memorializes, but we can crawl into a film and live there,” is her accurate description of this moment in the film, and of the three dimensional photograph that is *perezhivanie*.

Sobchack writes that in creating this moment in the film, Marker abides by film’s most fundamental rule:

> Thus, even as we are seemingly prepared, and even though the photographic move to cinematic movement is extremely subtle, we are nonetheless surprised and deem the
movement startling and “sudden.” This is because everything radically changes, and we and the image are reoriented in relation to each other. The space in between the camera’s (the spectator’s) gaze and the woman becomes suddenly habitable, informed with the real possibility of bodily movement and engagement, informed with lived temporality rather than eternal timelessness. (2004, pp. 145-146)

Vygotsky (1971) diagramed this very process of creating “lived temporality” through a “reorientation in relation” that is surprising, startling and “sudden,” in *The Psychology of Art*. Vygotsky portrays a quality of a short story, not a moment in a film (see Figure 1):

![Figure 1: Vygotsky’s (1971) diagram of the melody of Bunin’s “Gentle Breath.”](image)

_The Psychology of Art_ (1971) primarily concerns catharsis, and the process of working over in a _perezhivanie_ is known as catharsis (Blunden, 2015), so it should come as no surprise that Vygotsky’s 1925 thesis is relevant to a discussion of _perezhivaniya_. In his discussion of Bunin’s short story, *Gentle Breath*, Vygotsky describes a simultaneously classical and romantic process of analysis (what A. R. Luria called “Romantic Science,” but in a field that has only occasionally been considered a science) that allows one to “witness how a lifeless construction is transformed into a living organism” (1971, p. 150) (how moments add up to lives, in response to Lemke):

> It is useful to distinguish (as many authors do) the static scheme of the construction of the narrative, which we may call its anatomy, from the dynamic scheme, which we may call its physiology. We have already said that each story has a specific structure that differs from the structure of the material upon which it is based. It is also obvious that every poetic technique of treating the material is purposeful; it is introduced with some goal or other, and it governs some specific function of the story. By studying the teleology of the technique (the function of each stylistic element, the purposeful direction, the teleologic significance of each component) we shall understand the very essence of the story and witness how a lifeless construction is transformed into a living organism. (1971, pp. 149-150)

Vygotsky is arguing that either the structure of the material or the poetic technique, taken on its own, can reveal only the anatomy, the components visible after murder and dissection, just as one of the two, two dimensional photographs taken on its own cannot reveal the three dimensional image. To make physiology available for study we must juxtapose material and poetry, and then ask the function of the technique in relation to a whole. Vygotsky describes the first stage of this process, the “comparing the actual events upon which the story is based ... with the artistic form into which this material has been molded,” as “establishing the melodic curve (he calls this curve of the story its “melody”) which we find implemented by the words of the text” (1971, p. 150).

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5 Alexander Luria states: “When done properly, observation accomplishes the classical aim of explaining facts, while not loosing site of the romantic aim of preserving the manifold richness of the subject” (2006, 178).
Vygotsky creates his diagram (Figure 1) of the melody of Bunin’s short story by first putting the events of each of the two main character’s lives in chronological order along a straight line. Next, he draws curved lines to show the order of events as they take place in the short story: “The bottom curve represents transition to chronologically earlier events (when the author moves backward) and the top curves represent transition to chronologically advanced events (when the author leaps forward)” (1971, p. 152). Vygotsky notes: “The confused diagram reveals, at first glance, that the events do not evolve in a straight line, as would happen in real life, but in leaps and bounds” (1971, p. 152).

Sobchack and Vygotsky describe and portray the means of eliciting the aesthetic form of consciousness that is a *perezhivanie*. Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) tells us that when one is studying play, one’s arguments can be expected to spiral through levels of analysis, and this warning applies to the study of *perezhivaniya* as well. The next section of this paper will describe a working definition of a *perezhivanie*, which takes into account the work of a range of scholars and artists whose studies of the properties of *perezhivaniya* have converged, often without their using, or possibly even being aware of, the term ‘*perezhivanie*’, and whose studies proceed from several different levels of analysis.

Richard Schechner’s work will feature strongly in the working definition of *perezhivaniya* to be presented. His diagrams of “twice-behaved behavior” strengthen the portrayal of *perezhivaniya* that Vygotsky presented (Figure 1).

Schechner integrates the work of the child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, Victor Turner and Bateson (in his discussion of the “play frame” (1972)) with his own work as a theater director. He (1985) claims that the underlying processes of the ontogenesis of individuals, the social action of ritual, and the symbolic / fictive action of art are identical, and he supports this claim by describing, in concrete detail, the process of *perezhivanie* without using the term itself (although he is, of course, familiar with the work of Constantin Stanislavski (1949)). Schechner’s (1985) diagrams (Figure 2) of the juxtaposition of temporal double sidedness with progressive stages, a juxtaposition that produces twice-behaved behavior, are strikingly similar to Vygotsky’s diagram of his method of analysis of art even though Schechner’s subject is artistic creation, not analysis:

![Figure 2.2](image)

![Figure 2.3](image)

Figure 2: Schechner’s (1985) diagrams of the juxtaposition of temporal double sidedness with progressive stages that produces twice-behaved behavior.

**Working definition of a *perezhivanie***

Our working definition of a *perezhivanie* (Ferholt, 2009, 2015) is not a comprehensive definition but is instead a list of components and characteristics of a *perezhivanie*. Blunden (2015) provides
a first overview of perezhivaniya for those of us who do not read Russian. We will begin by highlighting the seven of his central points that are essential to our working definition.

Most important here, for our subsequent analysis of the stages of perezhivaniya, Blunden (2015) writes that perezhivaniya “have a beginning a middle and an end; they are events, episodes, activities, happenings or experiences in which people are active participants.” Also fundamental to our working definition are Blunden’s (ibid.) following two points: “a person’s intellect develops, along with the development of their emotions and their will, as aspects of their personality, through the perezhivaniya of their life”; and “Perezhivaniya are both objective and subjective.”

Dewey’s (1934/1939) concept of “An experience” is either closely related to a perezhivanie or a term that less completely describes the same phenomenon. However, Dewey’s (1934/1939) “Having an Experience” has helped several English-speaking scholars to understand the term perezhivanie, and Blunden (2015) highlights the active nature of perezhivaniya, and several other key aspects of perezhivaniya, with a series of four quotes from Dewey on “an experience.” Blunden writes that an experience and a perezhivanie:

“includes what men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and how men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine.” (p. 256) Experiences, as a countable noun: “each with its own plot, its own inception and movement towards its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement” (p. 555). He (Dewey) explained that “an experience” was an ‘original unity’, not a combination: “The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it.” (p. 556) And he understood its centrality in personal development: “The unsettled or indeterminate situation might have been called a problematic situation. … Without a problem, there is blind groping in the dark.” (p. 229)” (2015, page numbers are from a volume of Dewey’s works.)

Our working definition is in accord with these central points in Blunden’s (2015) work: each perezhivanie includes what is done and suffered and also the how of action of the actor/subject; has its own plot and rhythm, and single quality; is not a combination of emotion and cognition but a unity before such distinctions are made, a unity that includes will; grapples with a problem; is both subjective and objective; and, again, includes not just “an experience” but also the working over of this experience, which takes place over time in stages in which people are active participants. Our working definition also draws from many of the same scholars, beyond Vygotsky and Vasilyuk, from whom Blunden (ibid.) draws, including L. I. Bozhovich, Dot Robbins and Winnicott. We will contribute a discussion of the work of Schechner and Woolf, in which we relate Schechner and Woolf’s work to perezhivaniya (see Ferholt, 2009, 2015) with help from Michael Cole and Robbins, before presenting our list of components and characteristics of a perezhivanie.

Performance

For Schechner, performance is a perezhivanie. He writes: “Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to nth time. Performance is “twice-behaved behavior” (1985, p. 36). Schechner calls this “restored behavior” and adds: “Put in personal terms, restored behavior is “me behaving as if I am someone else” or as if I am ‘beside myself,’ or ‘not myself,’ as when in a trance” (1985, p. 37).

The essence of Schechner’s argument is that there are three parts to the process of performance, not two, and that in performance time flows in more than one direction:
Although restored behavior seems to be founded on past events – ... – it is in fact the 
synchronic bundle (of three parts) ... The past ... is recreated in terms not simply of a 
present, ... but of a future ... This future is the performance being rehearsed, the “fin-
ished thing” to be made graceful through editing, repetition, and intervention. Re-
stored behavior is both teleological and eschatological. It joins first causes to what 
happens at the end of time. (1985, p. 79)

Specifically, the way that the flow of time becomes multidirectional is that “rehearsals make it 
necessary to think of the future in such a way as to create a past” (1985, p. 39). As Schechner ex-
plains: “In a very real way the future – the project coming into existence through the process of 
rehearsal – determines the past: what will be kept from earlier rehearsals or from the “source ma-

Vasilyuk is describing the same phenomenon when he writes of the proleptic nature of 
perezhivanie in the development of Raskolnikov, the main character in Dostoevsky’s novel, 
Crime and Punishment:

Although the given schematism “fault – repentance – redemption – bliss” is formally 
expressed as a series of contents following one another in time, this does not mean 
that the later elements in the series appear in consciousness only after the earlier stag-
es have been traversed. They respond to one another psychologically and all exist at 
once in consciousness, as a Gestalt, though it is true they are expressed with varying 
degree of clarity as the series is gone through. Bliss is conferred even at the beginning 
of the road to redemption, as a kind of advance payment of emotion and meaning, 
needed to keep one going if a successful end is to be reached.” (1988, pp. 190-191)

Schechner outlines the three stages of this phenomenon (performance):

The workshop-rehearsal process is the basic machine for the restoration of behavior 
... (whose) primary function ... is a kind of collective memory-in/of-action. The first 
phase breaks down the performer’s resistance, makes him a tabula rasa. To do this 
most effectively the performer has to be removed from familiar surroundings. Thus 
the need for separation, for “sacred” or special space, and for a use of time different 
than that prevailing in the ordinary. The second phase is of initiation or transition: de-
veloping new or restoring old behavior. But the so-called new behavior is really the 
rearrangement of old behavior or the enactment of old behavior in new settings. In the 
third phase, reintegration, the restored behavior is practiced until it is second nature. 
The final part of the third phase is public performance. (1985, pp. 113-114)

These stages closely match those stages of perezhivaniya that Vasilyuk presents, even though 
Schechner and Vasilyuk’s terms differ.

The Pivot

Cole (2007) has used the term “temporally double sided” to describe the phenomenon of growing 
back and towards the future and the past simultaneously. (He has used it to relate Dewey’s notion 
of object to prolepsis.) As discussed above, our claim is that it is the juxtaposition of temporal 
double sidedness with these stages that creates a perezhivanie. What Schechner argues is that this 
juxtaposition provides the rhythm that allows us to raise ourselves up and hover, suspended mo-
mentarily in a state of being simultaneously ourselves and not ourselves: our past and future 
selves (someone else).6

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6 Dewey (1934) made a related point and his use of the word “purpose” brings us back to Vygotsky’s “po-
tential for free action that we find associated with the emergence of human consciousness” and Lilly /
It is Schechner’s “someone else” that Ferholt (2009) called the “pivot” of a *perezhivanie*. As Winnicott writes of play:

> Whereas inner psychic reality has a kind of location in the mind or in the belly or in the head or somewhere within the bounds of the individual’s personality, and whereas what is called external reality is located outside these bounds, playing and cultural experience can be given a location if one uses the concept of the potential space between the mother and the baby. (1971, p. 53) (as quoted in Schechner, 1985, p. 110)

According to Schechner, this potential space is the workshop-rehearsal:

> The most dynamic formulation of what Winnicott is describing is that the baby – and later the child at play and the adult at art (and religion) – recognizes some things and situations as “not me.” By the end of the process “the dance goes into the body.” So Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is also not not Hamlet. The reverse is also true: in this production of the play, Hamlet is not Olivier, but he is also not not Olivier. Within this field or frame of double negativity, choice and virtuality remain activated. (1985, p. 110)

Schechner explains a central component of the formation of this doubleness by referring to Winnicott’s transitional object (the blanket or stuffed animal that is the first “not-me,” representing the mother (primary caretaker) when she (he) is absent):

> Restored behaviors of all kinds ... are “transitional.” Elements that are “not me” become “me” without losing their “not me-ness.” This is the peculiar but necessary double negativity that characterizes symbolic actions. *While performing, a performer experiences his own self not directly but through the medium of experiencing the others.* [italics added] While performing, he no longer has a “me” but has a “not not me,” and this double negative relationship also shows how restored behavior is simultaneously private and social. A person performing recovers his own self only by going out of himself and meeting the others – by entering a social field. The way in which “me” and “not me,” the performer and the thing to be performed, are transformed into “not me ... not not me” is through the workshop-rehearsal/ritual process. (1985, pp. 111-112)

The workshop-rehearsal process allows one to use another person/fictional character as a pivot, to detach emotions that are personal from the self and to relive them through another, and this is the process that allows one to be that which one could not imagine without this process. What Vygotsky writes of the pivot that is art in *The Psychology of Art*, applies directly to the pivot of a *perezhivanie*:

> Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. It would be more correct to say that emotion becomes personal when every one of us experiences a work of art; it becomes personal without ceasing to be social. (1971, p. 249)

Woolf’s interest in “the meaning of life”: “The rhythm of loss of integration with the environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes ... “ (p. 14) Relating life to science as well as to art, Dewey (ibid.) adds: “Yet a common interest in rhythm is still the tie which holds science and art in kinship” (p. 156).

7 We are referring broadly to Vygotsky’s 1978 use of the term ‘pivot’ when writing on play.
The Present Moment

The sensation of being at the center of the workshop-rehearsal process is what Schechner calls an experience of the “present moment”:

Actions move in time, from past thrown into future, from “me” to “not me” and from “not me” to “me.” As they travel they are absorbed into the liminal, subjective time/space of “not me ... not not me.” This time/space includes both workshops-rehearsals and performances. Things thrown into the future (“Keep that.”) are recalled and used later in rehearsals and performances. During performance, if everything goes right, the experience is of synchronicity as the flow of ordinary time and the flow of performance time meet and eclipse each other. This eclipse is the “present moment,” the synchronous ecstasy, the autotelic flow, of liminal stasis. Those who are masters at attaining and prolonging this balance are artists, shamans, conmen, acrobats. No one can keep it long. (1985, pp. 112-113)

Schechner also describes this phenomenon through experience in the space of performance:

A performance “takes place” in the “not me ... not not me” between performers; between performers, texts and environment; between performers, texts, environment, and audience. The larger the field of “between,” the stronger the performance. The antistructure that is performance swells until it threatens to burst. The trick is to extend it to the bursting point but no further. It is the ambition of all performers to expand this field until it includes all beings, things, and relations. This can’t happen. The field is precarious because it is subjunctive, liminal, transitional: it rests not on how things are but on how things are not; its existence depends on agreements kept among all participants, including the audience. The field is the embodiment of potential, of the virtual, the imaginative, the fictive, the negative, the not not. The larger it gets, the more it thrills, but the more doubt and anxiety it evokes, too. (1985, p. 113)

Robbins describes this “present moment” and “field of between” of twice-behaved behavior, created in the juxtaposition of temporal double sidedness with the progressive stages of the workshop-rehearsal process, as the “anchor” of a perezhivanie. She writes: “Perezhivanie ... is an anchor in the fluidity of life, it represents a type of synthesis (not a concrete unity of analysis), but an anchor within the fleeting times we have on this earth, dedicated to internal transformation and involvement in our world” (2007).

Finally, if Dostoevsky shows us and allows us, through Raskolnikov, a perezhivanie (see Vasilyuk, 1988), Woolf (1927) both shows us perezhivaniya and lets us hear how her characters theorize these perezhivaniya. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf explores childhood and the creative process through a study of the act of seeing oneself seeing. Central to this work is the description of moments when “life stands still here,” as discussed above, but the quote above is worth reading in some greater context as Woolf’s next words in the novel do not have to do with revelation, but with Lilly’s pivot, the person/pivot to whom you owe a perezhivanie: “In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. “Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!” she repeated. She owed it all to her,” (1927, pp. 240-241).

Woolf, as the above quotation shows, also grasped the importance of the pivot in perezhivaniya. The following stages of perezhivaniya can, among other things, be used to reveal the role of the “pivot” in perezhivanie. This will allow us to better understand the workings of perezhivaniya and will allow us to respond to some of the questions which Blunden (2015) identifies concerning the types of pivots that are needed for perezhivaniya, for instance those that are needed at different ages (therapist, more mature friend, adult care-giver, etc.).
Components and characteristics of _perezhivaniya_

Within _perezhivaniya_:
- cognition and emotion are dynamically related;
- the relationship between individual and environment *is* the event;
- and there is the revitalizing of autobiographical emotional memories by imitating another’s (or a past self’s) physical actions.

_Perezhivanie_ is:
- an internal and subjective labor of ‘entering into,’ which is not done by the mind alone, but rather involves the whole of life or a state of consciousness;
- a coming back to something in your memory, living through it over and over again, until you discover that you have passed through it, and have survived;
- and ‘twice-behaved behavior.’

The following qualities of _perezhivaniya_ are also parts of this definition and are central to the following discussion of stages of _perezhivaniya_:
- time flows in more than one direction;
- there is a juxtaposition of this temporal double sidedness with stages;
- and there occurs an eclipse, which is the ‘present moment’, the synchronic ecstasy, the autotelic flow, of liminal stasis: no-one can keep it for long.

Concerning the pivot that propels one through the stages of a _perezhivanie_, _perezhivaniya_ are here defined as being:
- the potential space of ‘not not me;’
- the experiencing of the self, not directly but through the medium of experiencing the others;
- and a form of inter-subjectivity in which we insert ourselves into the stories of others in order to gain the foresight that allows us to proceed (in the face of despair).

**Stages of _perezhivaniya_**

Blunden (2015) refers to work describing the stages of _perezhivaniya_ and discusses the important contribution of Kübler-Ross (1969) concerning grieving, to this work. Blunden (*ibid.*), correctly in our opinion, identifies grieving as a type of _perezhivaniya_. The stages that Kübler-Ross describes, and those Schechner (1985) describes, are similar to each other and to other series of stages, which describe kindred phenomena and which derive from a variety of academic fields as well as religions.

In the following, for clarity, we call the three ‘stages’ of a _perezhivanie_, which are outlined by Schechner (1985) and Vasilyuk (1988), ‘phases’. Within each of these phases we have delineated three stages. These phases and stages are derived not only from the work of Schechner and Vasilyuk but also through analysis of empirical data from a Swedish preschool and from a playworld that took place in an elementary school in the United States (Ferholt 2009).

We only have space to outline these phases and stages in this paper:

**Schechner’s first phase / Vasilyuk’s fault**

1) Conflict arises
2) Boundaries blur
3) Traveling into another world

**Schechner’s second phase / Vasilyuk’s repentance**

4) Interacting in the other world
5) The worlds merge
6) Becoming a world designer

Schechner’s third phase / Vasilyuk’s redemption, including the public performance / bliss

7) Longing
8) Closure in the other world
9) Synopsis.

Vygotsky (2004) argued that children bring less prior experience to imagination, but the difference between adult and child imagination is one of degree, not of kind. We have come to posit that while young children bring less prior experience to perezhivaniya, there are perezhivaniya in early childhood, and that the difference between adult and child perezhivaniya is, as it is with adult and child imagination, one of degree, not of kind. Preliminary analysis has led us to believe that all the stages that take place in adult perezhivaniya take place in early childhood perezhivaniya, in the same order, but in a different time scale. This preliminary analysis has also led us to believe that adult observation of early childhood perezhivaniya is made possible through early childhood teaching, and so requires a new form of collaboration between preschools and the academy.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Vasilyuk (1988) called for ethnographers to empirically examine his understanding of perezhivaniya. Fernando Gonzales Rey explicitly asks us to think about what sort of methodology is needed to pursue such empirical studies of perezhivaniya. And Sutton-Smith warned us that applied study as well as empirical and theoretical study will be required if these most complex of human endeavors are to be better understood.

The need for applied study of perezhivaniya may bring us to early childhood education because there are not very many professions that concern themselves with creating the aesthetic form of consciousness. Having been preschool teachers ourselves, this seems to us an apt description of the profession. And we have found that many preschool teachers quickly and joyfully appropriate the concept when we introduce it to them.

However, the value of revising the timetable for the emergence of perezhivaniya may be greatest for researchers. If young children also pivot in perezhivaniya as they pivot in play, using an actual stick for a horse, then the elusive workings of perezhivaniya may be made visible and available for study through the study of early childhood perezhivaniya. And if teachers as well as artists are brought into the academy, we may come to change the parameters of what we have understood to be knowable (Turner, 1992).

Vygotsky called the separation of cognition and emotion “a major weakness of traditional psychology” because this separation “makes the thought process appear as an autonomous flow of ‘thoughts thinking themselves’, segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses, of the thinker” (1986, p. 10). The study of the fullness of life, or ‘how moments add up to lives’, is the ultimate concern of our above efforts to understand perezhivaniya from multiple disciplinary and professional perspectives, and levels of abstraction; at multiple points in the life span; and through multiple methods. It seems probable that such a study does require the further development of Romantic Science, the “bridge(ing) of segregated and differently valued knowledges, (and the) drawing together (of) legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry” (Conquergood, 2002, p.151-152).

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Vygotsky’s concept of *perezhivanie* in *The Psychology of Art* and at the final moment of his work: Advancing his legacy*

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This article discusses Vygotsky’s definitions of the concept of *perezhivanie*, its contradictions and gaps. The concept of *perezhivanie* was first discussed by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* (1925); he came back to its study only in 1933-1934. The different meanings of the concept in these two moments are discussed throughout the present paper. Despite the vagueness in the definition of the psychological nature of *perezhivanie*, the ideas developed by Vygotsky regarding this concept represented an advance in the study of motivation and psychological development in Soviet psychology. At the same time, the concept was an important premise for the study of subjectivity. Then, a theoretical proposal approaching subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint is discussed.  

**Keywords:** *Perezhivanie*, social situation of development, sense, subjectivity.

**INTRODUCTION**

The concept of *perezhivanie* was first discussed by Vygotsky in his foundational work *The Psychology of Art*. This book was overlooked for a long time in Soviet psychology as a result of the dominant objectivism that prevailed in this psychology. Because it was read through the theoretical lenses of Leontiev and his followers, who for decades monopolized the legacy of his work, some ignored for decades the relevance of the concepts developed by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* and in his last works, among which were the concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense.  

In the last ten years, however, the concept of *perezhivanie* has increasingly been the object of attention from many researchers (Fakhrutdinova, 2010; Fleer & Quiñones, 2013; Fleer & Hammer, 2013; Smagorinsky, 2011; González Rey, 2009; among others), mainly as result of the increased interest in the topics of emotion, motivation and subjectivity within the cultural-historical approach. However, as was common in Vygotsky’s work, especially with the concepts developed by him from 1932 onward, the concept of *perezhivanie* that was used by him had different meanings at the first and the last moments of his works. At the end, the precise definition of the psychological nature of *perezhivanie* remained open and incomplete, just as was the case with the concept of *sense*.  

The present paper aims to discuss *perezhivanie* as it was treated by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* and in his last writings, mainly in *The Problem of Environment* and in “The crisis of age seven.” Vygotsky’s definition of *perezhivanie*, along with other key concepts, signaled the emergence of a new representation of the human psychological system. The concepts that Vygotsky directly related to *perezhivanie*, as well as those that could be related to *perezhivanie* but were not used, are also discussed because of their relevance to understanding gaps in Vygotsky’s understanding of *perezhivanie*. The present paper discusses the potential that *perezhivanie* offers for the development of psychological theory as well as its insufficiencies.  

The concept of *perezhivanie* in *The Psychology of Art*

Despite Vygotsky’s *The Psychology of Art* having been largely ignored in both Soviet and Western psychology, this book has been one of the more important contributions of Vygotsky to the development of psychology.

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In *The Psychology of Art*, *perezhivanie* was introduced simultaneously with the concepts of emotions, creativity, motivation and the person as creator, as the subject of the artistic performance. The motivational side of artistic performance appeared to be Vygotsky’s focus in this moment of his work as well as the individual in his/her involvement with this performance.

Vygotsky utilized *perezhivanie* in a slightly different way from how the word was understood in Russian. Vygotsky defined *perezhivanie* as the emotion that characterizes the creative artistic performance, which also involves talent and operational processes. On the basis of this intrinsic relation between operational processes and emotions, it is possible to think about a new definition of a psychological function, thinking of it not as an instrumental process but as a “function of the subject,” organized as the indivisible unity of intellect and affect. Defining emotion as intrinsic to artistic performance, Vygotsky implicitly defined artistic performance as the motivation for its own realization. The concept of the “function of the subject” prevailed in this definition over the concept of function as an instrument, which is the position that has frequently been associated with Vygotsky (Bruner, 1985).

However, despite the recognition of the emotional character of *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky differentiated emotion from *perezhivanie*:

> By its nature, artistic *perezhivanie* remains incomprehensible and closed to the subject in its course and essence. We never know why we like or dislike a work of art. Everything we later invent to explain its influence is thought to be a complete rationalization of unconscious processes. The very essence of *perezhivanie* remains a mystery for us. (Vygotsky, 1965, p. 25; my translation from Russian)

Vygotsky defended the unconscious character of *perezhivanie* that allows the concept to be considered a psychological formation rather than a process. As he stated in the quotation above, the essence of *perezhivanie* remained a mystery to him, and this mystery remained until the end of his life. Vygotsky never offered an ontological definition of the concept, which, to a great extent, was the cause for the multiple meanings the concept had at different moments of his work and for the multiple interpretations of *perezhivanie* until today. The lack of a definition of *perezhivanie* also makes it difficult to define the difference between *perezhivanie* and other concepts that were used by Vygotsky at the same time.

One of the strong points raised by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* was to recognize the value of emotions as human reality, which overcame the logical and intellectual reductionism that has characterized psychology until today. He clearly expressed this position:

> … all our fantastic [and unreal] *perezhivaniya*, take place on a completely real emotional basis. We see, therefore, that emotion and imagination are not two separate processes; on the contrary, they are the same process. We can rightly can regard a fantasy as the central expression of an emotional reaction. (Vygotsky, 1971, p.210)\(^{10}\)

The definition of emotions being as real as any other human phenomena implies the recognition of the specificity of a human psychological world that does not have an immediate and natural relation with the external reality in which the human action is placed. This statement recognizes

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\(^{8}\) Vygotsky used the concept of psychological formation in his definition of imagination during his “Lectures in Psychology”, specifically in the lecture devoted to “Imagination and its development in childhood”. The concept of imagination appeared to indicate more complex psychological formations.

\(^{9}\) I consider as ontological the specific theoretical representation through which one system of facts becomes a signified system susceptible to certain methodological procedures. (González Rey, 2015, p.17).

\(^{10}\) I have used the English edition of *The Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1971, p.210) after comparison with the original version in Russian from the 1965 edition of *Psychology of Art*. 
the specific character of human emotions as inseparable from imagination and fantasy in creative performances. Emotion was not defined any longer as an isolated and secondary process but as a process closely integrated with other ones, part of the most relevant human performances. *Perezhivanie* was closely related to this emphasis given to emotion by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art*.

Because of the vagueness of the definition of *perezhivanie*, it is possible to raise the question regarding why Vygotsky did not consider *perezhivanie* as the unity of imagination, emotion and fantasy. Since the beginning of his work, Vygotsky was clear that the complex unity of emotion, imagination and fantasy had a decisive relevance for the comprehension of human psyche; however, he did not advance a concept able to integrate those three processes. This unity appeared as a strong intuition of his thinking in *The Psychology of Art*.

A weighing of the concept of *perezhivanie* as it appeared in *The Psychology of Art* allows us to make several assumptions.

First, the concept of *perezhivanie* was closely associated with Vygotsky’s idea that psychical functions in the creative performances always embody the emotion-imagination unity, on the basis of which *perezhivanie* could be considered an indicator that psychological functions are not instrumental functions but functions of the subject in its affective-volitional expression. This idea was not advanced further; however, it represented an interesting provocation in a psychology ruled by a strict rationalism.

Second, the concept of *perezhivanie* in *The Psychology of Art*, represented a first step towards a potentially new definition of motivation. The idea that motivation is external to psychological functioning was replaced by the idea that motive is the emotional-intellectual organization of the proper psychical function involved in the creative performance.

Third, *perezhivanie* advanced the idea that human motivation was essentially an unconscious process. This idea was influenced by Freud; however, in contrast to Freud, Vygotsky associated *perezhivanie* with non-universal human forces and defined this concept in close relation with action. Furthermore, his concept was differentiated from the Freudian concept of unconscious motivation by the fact that Vygotsky never considered psychological functions to be motivated by universal impulses.

Vygotsky’s interest in more systemic psychological concepts able to explain sentiment and fantasy was clear in this statement from *The Psychology of Art*:

> It is necessary to say, however, that there are not two more obscure topics that these two [Vygotsky is referring to sentiments and fantasy] and although they were subjected to more development and examination in recent times, at least until today, unfortunately, we have not any general recognized and elaborated system for the study of sentiments and fantasy. (Vygotsky, 1965, p. 256, my translation from Russian)

*Perezhivanie* was intrinsically associated with motivational processes at this first moment of Vygotsky’s work. Vygotsky emphasized the fact that there was not any elaborated system for the study of sentiments and fantasy; one of the options for advancing this system is to elaborate on the topic of subjectivity, as will be discussed below.

**Final moments of Vygotsky’s work: the emergence of *perezhivanie* within a new theoretical system**

Between 1932 and 1934, Vygotsky returned to his foundational agenda in *The Psychology of Art*. Once again, the concept of *perezhivanie* appeared relevant, this time within a new group of concepts, such as sense and the new definition of thinking as a function of the subject. *Perezhivanie* was intrinsically associated with the concept of the “social situation of development.”
In this last moment of his work, Vygotsky stressed comprehension and generalization as essential for the emergence of perezhivanie, a position unlike the one in The Psychology of Art and one that was criticized by Bozhovich (1968) as intellectualist-reductionist. The following statement is a clear example of Vygotsky’s position:

At the age of seven years, we are dealing with the onset of the appearance of a structure of perezhivanie, in which the child begins to understand what it means when he says “I’m happy”, “I’m unhappy”, “I’m angry”, “I’m good”, “I’m bad,” that is, he is developing an intellectual orientation to his own perezhivaniya (…)

Generalization of perezhivaniya or affective generalization, the logic of feelings – appears at the beginning of the crisis at age seven. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 291)

In the above statement, Vygotsky identified perezhivaniya as affective generalizations, subordinating the relevance of the emotion to the comprehension of the emotion by the child. Rather than being articulated with other emotional-intellectual functions such as imagination and fantasy, perezhivanie is referred to now as the intellectualization of emotions.

This intellectual reductionism in the comprehension of emotion not only created difficulties in explaining the relevance of emotions as self-generative processes (as the concept was coined by Vygotsky in 1932) but also led to a narrow representation of the emotional relevance of the relation between the child and the adult since the early moments of their lives. “Let us say that the child does not talk before he is a year old. When he starts to talk, the speech environment of those around him remains unchanged” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 293). From this statement, it is possible to conclude that language is only relevant due to its meaning, which is profoundly contradictory with the concept of sense. Vygotsky argued:

A word’s sense is the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word. Sense is a dynamic, fluid, and complex formation which has several zones that vary in their stability. Meaning is only one of these zones of the sense that the word acquires in the context of speech (…).(...) Ultimately, the sense of a word depends on one’s understanding of the word as a whole and on the internal structure of personality. (Vygotsky, 1987a, p. 275-6)

The difference between meaning and sense becomes clear in the above excerpt. At the same time, sense appears to be a unit of consciousness for its capacity to integrate “everything in consciousness which is related to what the word expresses.” Among these different psychological facts that arise in consciousness as a result of the word, intellectual and emotional facts can be included. Maybe, that statement represented the most obvious attempt, by Vygotsky, to consider the unity of affective and intellectual processes.

Vygotsky stressed the comprehension of the word, as well as personality, on the basis of sense. Therefore, comprehension appears here as inseparable from the internal structure of personality, which might lead to thinking of psychological functions as sense functions. However, this conclusion must be inferred by the reader because Vygotsky was never explicit when he referred to the relation between these concepts during the final stages of his work.

In “On the question of the psychology of the creative actor,” Vygotsky seemed to get closer to a new definition of emotions as intrinsically associated with other psychological functions, attributing to them a generative character that does not depend on intellectual operations, as stressed in the next statement:

In the process of social life, feelings develop and former connections disintegrate; emotions appear in new relations with other elements of mental life, new systems develop, new alloys of mental functions and unities of a higher order appear within
which special patterns, interdependencies, special forms of connection and movement are dominant. (Vygotsky, 1999, p. 244).

From this quotation, it is clear that Vygotsky is treating emotions as independent from intellectual operations. Their psychological status is similar to those of other elements and functions of psychical life, as a result of which their new associations and integrations lead to new psychological systems and to the emergence of units of a higher order that could be considered as being intellectual-emotional units. However, Vygotsky did not develop this idea further in his work.

His definition of thinking as inseparable from emotions is oriented towards the same meaning given by him to the emotion as inseparable from other psychological functions. He wrote:

> Among the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology has been the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspects of consciousness. The inevitable consequence of the isolation of these functions has been the transformation of thinking into an autonomous stream. Thinking itself became the thinker of thoughts. Thinking was divorced from the full vitality of life, from the motives, interests and inclinations of the thinking individual. (Vygotsky, 1987a, p. 50)

Vygotsky understood thinking as a function of the subject that could not be divorced from the “full vitality of life.” However, the concept of perezhivanie, which could be used as a synthesis able to express the “full vitality of life,” was not brought by Vygotsky to this reflection. The inseparable integration of thinking, emotions, imagination and fantasy, which expresses the history of the individual as thinker, is clearly embodied in one of the many statements given by Vygotsky on perezhivanie:

> “… on the one hand, in perezhivanie, environment is given in its relation to me, how I perezhivat this environment; on the other hand, features of the development of my personality have an effect. My perezhivanie is affected by the extent to which all my properties and how they came about in the course of development participate here at a given moment. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 294)

Reflecting on this quotation, it is not difficult to represent the act of thought precisely as the “full vitality” of life that emerges as the psychological unit within which the thought takes place at the present minute. We can see the affinities of sense and perezhivanie, which advanced simultaneously in Vygotsky’s work without any reference of one in relation to the other. The immaturity of these definitions is clear by the absence of links between them and with other theoretical constructions that were simultaneously advanced by Vygotsky at the time. Both sense and perezhivanie appear as an aggregate of facts: sense as the aggregate of psychological facts that arise in consciousness as result of the word, and perezhivanie as the aggregate of all of the characteristics of the personality with all of the characteristics of the environment.

Vygotsky explicitly defined perezhivanie as the unit of consciousness (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 294), but, in my opinion, perezhivanie must be understood as the unity of environment and personality. As Vygotsky stated, “The child’s perezhivanie is also this kind of very simple unit [edinitsa], about which we must not say that in itself it represents the influence of the environment on the child or individuality of the child himself; perezhivanie is a unit [edinitsa] of personality and environment as it is represented in development” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 294). Vygotsky could not define the new quality that emerges in perezhivanie as a unit, to differentiate it from the two systems involved in its genesis, and for these reasons he appealed to the formula: “(…) all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342). What does this mixture of characteristics mean? How does this mix-
ture of characteristics work psychologically? I think that these questions do not have answer. This mixture is not a unit according to Vygotsky’s definition of what a unit is.

Vygotsky referred to the *perezhivanie* more by its function than by its psychological nature. Therefore, he noted:

> Therefore, it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child), which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factor refracted through the prism of the child’s *perezhivanie*. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 340)

*Perezhivanie* as defined above is a psychological formation of personality, the unit formed in personality as result of the social influence that cannot be taken in its absolute attributes, as Vygotsky stated. This definition permits us to overcome the concepts of reflection, internalization and social determinism. *Perezhivanie* appears as being the singular way in which the children perceive and feel social influences. Instead of simply internalizing social influence, it becomes relevant to the child from a psychological point of view once it is embedded in the child’s personality through *perezhivanie*. Vygotsky used personality to refer to the idea of psychological system, but, in his use of the concept, he remained in the old idea of personality organized by personal characteristic without specifying the psychological nature of these characteristics.

What does the critique addressed by Vygotsky to the understanding of environment as an absolute mean? It means to consider the environment not as a given objective reality but as a relative reality whose influence on psychological development is possible only through *perezhivaniya*. However, the understanding of how a social influence is refracted through a *perezhivanie* implies understanding *perezhivanie* as a formation of personality organized during the ongoing action in which the individual is engaged at the present moment; i.e., *perezhivanie* must emerge as part of a personality, as part of a psychological system that cannot be identified with the external influence. However, Vygotsky did not specify why personality is different from the social influences and once again overemphasized the role of consciousness in the impact of the social influence on the child. “The environment determines the type of development depending on the degree of awareness of this environment which the child has managed to reach” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 346).

The heuristic value of *perezhivanie* is based on new alternatives that can be opened on the basis of the concept for the understanding of psychological development. The internal resources of the child are decisive for the emergence of a *perezhivanie*. The environment is not understood any longer as influencing the development from outside.

In this final moment of his life, Vygotsky developed concepts that signalized his interest by the definition of new systemic psychological units, but he could not define the psychological nature of these units, a fact that explains the gaps in these concepts for advancing new theoretical constructions with regards to human motivation, personality and psychological development. The concepts that suggested new psychological units were left as aggregates of different facts, without specifying new qualitative systemic units.

**Advancing the legacy of *perezhivanie*: subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint**

As previously discussed, among the most pertinent theoretical avenues created by the concept of *perezhivanie* is its usefulness in transcending the definition of environment as a system of external influences. The concept of *perezhivanie* is defined as internal in some of the references of Vygotsky to this concept as, for example, when he stated:
The restructuring of needs and motives and the reevaluation of values are basic factors in the transition from age level to age level. Here, the environment also changes, that is, the relation of the child to the environment. Other things begin to interest the child, he develops other activity, and his consciousness is restructured, if we understand consciousness as the relation of the child to the environment. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 296)

The essential fact of the transition from one age to the other is located by Vygotsky in the changes of internal psychological processes from which the changes of the environment take place. However, consciousness is defined here as the relation between the child and environment, not as a psychological system, as consciousness seemed to be defined by him through the notion of sense. These contradictions and gaps with regards to psychological concepts impede Vygotsky from advancing in defining the psychological nature of consciousness and on the ontological definitions of the concepts developed by him at the final moment of his work.

Approaching that contradiction in Vygotsky’s work, I attempt to fulfill the ontological vacuum left by Vygotsky in his more complex concepts through a new definition of subjectivity that has been possible only on the basis of its comprehension as a cultural, historical and social production. Subjectivity as defined here permits us to specify the psychological nature of the psychological system and many of its processes and functions.

The understanding of subjectivity from a cultural-historical perspective demands an advancement of the studies on the concepts of perezhivanie, sense and “social situation of development” and the recognition of human psychological processes and formations as subjective productions defined by integrative emotional-symbolic synthesis capable of expressing the multiple experiences as they are lived by the individual in different moments. These processes are responsible for the way in which lived experiences are felt, recreated, imagined, perceived, thought, and invented for the individuals. The realities within which the human processes occur are cultural, subjective realities and not objective realities that carry out universal values independently of the ways in which they are felt and lived by individuals.

The development of the topic of subjectivity requires consideration of the relevance of the symbolical processes and realities as essential from a cultural-historical standpoint. Only the symbolical processes, by their plasticity and their inseparable integration with human emotions, allow the integration of the multiplicity of emotions and symbolical unfolding of one experience in one unit. The definition of this unit is the basis of our proposal of subjectivity. The human subjective processes are never moved by one final cause and do not represent stable contents; they flow in time, integrate, and unfold into different forms during the same experience.

Taking into account the prior considerations, what type of concepts would be necessary to advance the study of subjectivity? In our opinion, these concepts must have the following characteristics:

- First, they must represent symbolical-emotional units. It is necessary to understand the intellectual processes differently from the way in which these processes were treated in Soviet psychology and to advance a new comprehension of these processes within the “full vitality of life” as it was defined in relation to thought by Vygotsky. This integration of the “full vitality of life” in the study of the intellectual functions requires a completely new understanding of what ‘intellectual’ means. Intellectual functions must be understood as complex subjective formations within which intellectual operations are inseparable from emotions and from other symbol-emotional processes such as imagination, fantasy and other symbol-emotional productions capable of embodying the history and the current context of life of the person as the subject of intellectual functions.
The concepts used for the study of subjectivity must be capable of simultaneously advancing subjectivity both as a process and as dynamic configurations able to take different forms during the flux of human action.

Subjectivity is not a fact that determines the action; it represents the actual psychological nature of the action as defined by Rubinstein in his formulation of the principle of the unity between consciousness and activity.

The concepts used in the study of subjectivity must be capable of integrating a subject’s lived experiences from the past with the imaginative ideas of the future into the present. These experiences would not appear as a sum of lived experiences but as new symbolical-emotional productions based on these lived experiences, which represent new imagined experiences regarding them. These processes are always behind consciousness, which represents an epistemological and methodological challenge.

Our proposal regarding subjectivity is based on theoretical concepts that, in their interrelation, permit advancement on the legacy of the concepts of *perezhivanie*, sense and social situation of development using new approaches. The concepts of our proposal are subjective sense, subjective configurations, subject and social and individual subjectivity. Ultimately, I do not believe that *perezhivanie* is a useful concept for psychology, although it retains great importance in the history of cultural-historical psychology.

Subjective senses represent a constant flux of symbolical-emotional chains that characterize human experience. In our definition, the symbolical and emotional processes are organized in subjective units defined as subjective senses. Subjective senses have an ephemeral existence within the chaotic movement of the subjective configurations that human experience represents; in this chaos, one subjective sense unfolds into other senses in an endless process. Thus, for example, an expression of the affection of a father to his son can provoke multiple subjective senses that will be responsible for the affective relevance of his father’s expression. If this son feels he is inferior to his brother and exhibits jealousy and rejection towards him, he can feel the expression of love from his father motivated by pity towards him and not as an authentic affection. This subjective production is as real as any concrete object in the world, and it represents the symbolical-emotional realities that characterize human mind and culture.

Subjective senses, in this example, are multiple, and they do not appear in words but as snapshots of symbolic-emotional flashes. These flashes follow one another and can be represented in different ways, such as memories of the father’s behaviors that took a new subjective sense at this moment, feelings related to his mother as the only person that really loves him, and emotions that resulted from the feeling that he never achieved the admiration of his father. These feelings do not appear in words, and each feeling appears closely related to multiple symbolical expressions. This unit is configured by multiple unknown emotions, perceptions, memories and imaginary constructs organized as the subjective senses on which the perception of his father is felt and represented by him in that particular moment. This subjective unit is the subjective configuration.

In the comprehension of how a social experience influences an individual, it is impossible to select the objective elements responsible for our psychological position, which is why in real experiences the imaginary productions of the individual are responsible for his/her behaviors. The concrete influences of the present time are always perceived through subjective senses that integrate the present time, the past and the future in one tissue of interwoven symbolical processes and emotions. As a result, expressions and behaviors that are not justified by the present objective appearances of the present given situation emerge from this tissue.

Subjective senses always imply different and simultaneous processes; one emotion evokes a perception that, in turn, leads to a thought, which evokes new emotions in a complex chain that are beyond the conscious representation of any immediate given situation. The individual is usually aware of the representation on which his/her ideas are organized; however, the complex
symbolical-emotional organization within which these ideas are developed remains hidden from his/her consciousness.

This flux of subjective senses that characterizes human experiences as such is organized as subjective configurations, which are responsible for the dominant psychological processes embodied in human actions and performances. Unlike perezhivanie, the definition of the subjective senses emphasizes not the unity of the environment and the features of the personality; subjective senses are the unit formed by the symbolic processes and emotions, a unit which is intrinsic to human beings, representing a subjective production, not a refraction of the external. At the same time the subjective senses are beyond any conscious representation, as perezhivanie was defined by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art*, changing his position in *The crisis of the age seven*.

The concept of subjective configuration facilitates an understanding of subjectivity in two levels: social (social subjectivity) and individual (individual subjectivity). There is no relation of determinism of one upon the other; however, there is a recursive relation that enables an understanding of how each level is configured into the other through specific subjective senses. Subjective configurations never express directly the nature of the subjective senses configured in them; they are a new qualitative level of integration of the subjective senses, able to generate new subjective senses according to their own organization. These complex processes enrich themselves through the imaginative creativity of the subject and cannot be studied by inductive-descriptive methods but by constructive-interpretative approaches, whose discussion is beyond the scope of the present paper.

According to this theoretical account, psychological functions turn into functions of the subject. However, the concept of the subject in our theoretical proposal is understood as the individual or group that opens new paths of subjectivation in the normative spaces within which the individual and social actions occur. Being a subject is a qualitative attribute of the individuals and groups that is not inherent to them but that qualify their actions in some contexts. The subject is active in his positions and decisions. Each decision is subjectively configured; however, at the same time, it represents a new source of subjective senses. The individual is an active moment of the subject’s subjectivity; he/she thinks, feels, imagines, and generates perceptions and fantasies, which continuously generates processes of subjectivation that are inseparable from the subjective configurations that embody their different mental functions and actions.

The concept of subjective configuration permits the study of the multiplicity of subjective senses that embody the simultaneous effects of lived experiences, which taken together with the subject’s subjective creations, lead to new subjective realities in which “the external social influences” become unrecognizable. The subjective senses generated by the subjective configurations do not represent one more psychological process; they are the dynamic force of the intellectual productions and actions of the subject, which imply the lack of existence of pure cognitive processes, as it was anticipated by Vygotsky, in his comprehension of the thought. Pure cognitions only characterize formal activities without emotional involvement.

Subjective development occurs through subjective configurations able to mobilize different psychological processes, whose integration represents new qualitative moments of individuals. There are no criteria external to the individual capable of explaining its development, which is the more important legacy of the concepts of perezhivanie and “social situation of development”. Each individual develops her/himself in the moments of life in which new subjective configurations emerge that are capable of mobilizing into its unit many new subjective resources, which lead to qualitative changes that extend to different areas of the individual and social life instances. These changes are the sensitive moments of subjective development.

This proposal of subjectivity emphasizes the generative, imaginative character of the different human psychological processes and cultural productions. This approach represents an attempt to overcome the notion of objectivity, understood as the determination of psychological processes
and formations by immediate external facts and objects, which remains widespread among some authors who follow Vygotsky’s positions in psychology.

Final remarks

In both moments of Vygotsky’s work, the concept of *perezhivanie* marked a transition in his work. The elements on which this estimation is based include the lack of definition of the psychological nature of *perezhivanie*, the different meanings attributed to this concept throughout Vygotsky’s work, the lack of definition of the psychological system in which the psychological unit would become *perezhivanie*, and the lack of interrelation between *perezhivanie*, as well as other concepts that Vygotsky simultaneously used at the moments in which he used *perezhivanie*.

At this moment, the concept of *perezhivanie* is important essentially because of its historical significance. It expresses, as demonstrated in two different moments discussed in this paper, a set of concerns of the author that indicates a thought in transition towards a different psychology, which the author did not develop further. Nevertheless, the concept represents a new starting point, one which cannot be used at the present moment in the form in which Vygotsky left it.

In *The Psychology of Art*, *perezhivanie* referred to the wholeness of human actions and performances in the art. Later, in Vygotsky’s final works, *perezhivanie* was defined as a unity of human development. It was defined as inseparable from the concept of “social situation of development” in such a way that *perezhivanie* emerged as the new psychological unity that determines the relevance of a given social influence on a child’s development.

Despite the vagueness of its definition, *perezhivanie* was a useful concept because it permitted the questioning of certain principles that had ruled Soviet psychology for a long time – the principle of reflection, immediate social determinism, and the concept of leading activity as the cornerstone for the comprehension of psychological development. Because *perezhivanie* emerged from the relation between a social influence and the child’s personality, it represents both concepts as a relation that does not enable any external process or object to be considered the leading role in subjective development.

As a result of the gaps in the definition of *perezhivanie*, and based on its provocative presuppositions, it is possible to develop the topic of subjectivity in such a way that the unfinished legacy of *perezhivanie* is advanced. The approach to subjectivity discussed in this paper aims to advance this legacy on the basis of the symbolical-emotional units that are organized as subjective senses and subjective configurations. This opens space for the integration of singular paths of human existences as the basis on which the social networks that characterize human experiences are implicated in the generation of subjective senses that become the basis for understanding subjective development.

REFERENCES


Perezhivanie in the Light of the Later Vygotsky’s Spinozist Turn*

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Perezhivanie is a category that takes on special significance in the light of the Spinozist turn that Vygotsky was beginning to take toward the end of his life but the development of which was interrupted by his untimely death. In this study, we use several empirical classroom episodes to exhibit how, with perezhivanie, psychological research necessarily moves from an empiricist stage to an inquiry into “peak psychology,” one that is oriented towards the future. We end by suggesting that perezhivanie in the light of the later Vygotsky’s direction requires, as he articulated in his notebooks, rewriting much of the theory he had established before.

**Keywords:** perezhivanie; Spinoza; monism; unity/identity; one substance.

Over the past 35 years, there has been an exponential increase of interest in the term perezhivanie (Roth & Jornet, 2016). Some of the scholars who have employed the term come out of a cultural-historical (sociocultural) tradition; others, like us, have had very different intellectual histories and have come to Vygotsky and perezhivanie only after having become aware of the importance of person–environment relations through American pragmatist traditions. We have been particularly interested in those of Vygotsky’s texts and transcribed lectures that he produced close to the end of his life. At that time, his scholarship was taking, according to his own notes, a radical departure from his earlier work (Zavershneva, 2010b). This shift would have led him to a new psychological theory of consciousness that was to overcome the Cartesian dualism and intellectual bias latent in his earlier work (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2015) by bringing together intellect and affect, thinking and “the full vitality of life” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 50).

Our own research trajectory is defined by its encounter with American pragmatism and its analysis of what is called “experience.” We became aware then that the uses of the term experience are so varied that it leads to conceptual confusion and theoretical problems. It is at that time that we found in perezhivanie a category useful to our research. We are empirically working learning scientists, who use, develop, and sometimes discard categories for the purpose of understanding knowing and learning across settings and lifespan. Our goal, therefore, is not to interpret what Vygotsky might have meant when he used perezhivanie and its different verbal and adjectival forms. Most importantly, we are interested in developing the use of perezhivanie in the Spinozist direction that Vygotsky was starting to take towards the end of his life without ever being able to fully articulate it—Thinking and Speech (Vygotsky, 1987) and The Teachings of Emotion (Vygotsky, 1999) being preparatory works for what was to come. For us, E. Iu. Zavershneva, who had access to Vygotsky’s notes in the family archive, and F. T. Mikhailov, who was interested in the Spinozist turn Vygotsky was taking, have been helpful leads in setting up an appropriate research agenda.

We begin by presenting a working definition for perezhivanie, which we subsequently anchor in the analyses of concrete classroom episodes from a second-grade mathematics classroom. In a discussion section, we show how considering perezhivanie in the light of Vygotsky’s Spinozist

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turn demands a non-dualist rethinking of notions central to past and current cultural-historical theory.

**A WORKING DEFINITION OF PEREZHIVANIE**

Vygotsky used the term *perezhivanie* differently in the course of his scholarly career. For us the definition he gave in a lecture only a month before his death (Korotaeva, 2001) is the starting point. During this period, Vygotsky was turning to Spinoza to deal with the psychophysical (i.e. body–mind) problem and to overcome the separation of intellect and affect, thinking, and speaking (Vygotsky, 1987). Contrary to Descartes, who thought of (body) extension and thought as two opposite substances, Spinoza conceived body and mind as two attributes (manifestations) of *one substance* (Spinoza, 2002). Here *substance* is not a synonym for the empiricist notion of *matter*, nor was it intended to state that mind and body are one and the same thing. Mind and body cannot be the same just as “a circle is one thing, the idea of a circle another … nor is the idea of a body itself a body” (p. 10). Instead, they are “two different modes of existence, two forms of the manifestation of … real infinite Nature” (Il’enkov, 1977, p. 32).

In his *perezhivanie* lecture, Vygotsky is concerned with the role of the environment in development. He is seeking to find the prism through which the influence of the environment is refracted in the child’s development (Vygotsky, 1994). That prism—which refracts rather than mirror-like reflects the environment—is *perezhivanie*:

> *Perezhivanie is a unit [edinitsa] where, on the one hand in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e., that which is perezhivat—a perezhivanie is always related to something which is found outside the person—and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, perezhivat this, i.e., all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie.*

(Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342, original emphasis)

Vygotsky defines *perezhivanie* as the unity/identity [*edinstvo*] of personal and environmental characteristics. In Vygotsky’s dialectical approach, *perezhivanie* is not just a union of two mutually exclusive but interacting, parallel phenomena, but in fact is a category that captures the identity of person and environment. The objective environment—e.g., as may be described by a physicist—is not the environment considered here, for the same event is refracted differently in different individuals. Most importantly, the relationship between the child and her material and social environment does not just exist in the co-location of the two. If it were in this manner, then perception alone—in the empiricist sense—would account for the relationship between person and environment. Instead, the event as a significant whole, as a “semantic orientation” (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva 2010c, p. 63), constitutes the *psychological fact*. As a Marxist psychologist and philosopher who greatly influenced Vygotsky writes, “the psychological fact is a segment of the life of the particular individual” (Politzer, 1994, p. 47); that is, not *perezhivanie* in general, but concrete *perezhivaniya*.

*Perezhivanie* not only denotes the unity, but also constitutes, simultaneously, a (psychological) unit. Unlike elements, units “represent such products of analysis which ... manage to retain, in the most elementary form, the properties inherent in the whole” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342). Relative to child development, *perezhivanie* is a unit that embodies “the development of a child’s personality, his consciousness, and of his relationship with the reality around him” (p. 347). *Perezhivaniya* are manifestations of those social events that the subject lives and which constitute her consciousness and personality. As social events, *perezhivaniya* involve not just intellect but most centrally *drama*, the real unity of which cannot be broken without losing the event’s signification and personal relevance. *Perezhivanie* is thus shot through with affect, since “every-
thing that is actually [perezhivat] is [perezhivat]\textsuperscript{11} as something given and as something-yet-to-be-determined, is intonated, has an emotional volitional tone, and enters into an effective relationship to me within the unity of the ongoing event encompassing us” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 33 [32]).

Language is the key to consciousness, it is in and through language that “consciousness ... exists in practice for other people and therefore for myself” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 285). Not language in the abstract, but as it exists in the concrete act of speech. The relationship therefore is achieved in the act, of which the affective-volitional and the intellectual dimensions are but two irreducible moments (parts) (Bakhtin, 1993). It does not consist of the co-presence of organism and environment, as when an animal relates to its environment. This is so because “[t]he animal does not ‘relate’ itself to anything, it does not ‘relate’ itself at all” (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 44). The existence of the relation as relation is the result of human consciousness, which itself is a historical product of society. In perezhivanie, “we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in perezhivanie” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342). Perezhivanie, therefore, is a form of double description including the indivisible person–environment unity/identity and the refraction of this unity/identity in that same unit.

Finally, perezhivanie promotes ontogeny: It is a generative unit and therefore requires a genetic method. Consistent with Spinoza’s conception of Nature as a self-moving entity, which “is in itself and conceived through itself” (Spinoza, 2002, p. 217), perezhivanie denotes self-movement, a developing unity/identity that covers both the “given” and the “something-yet-to-be-determined” in the Bakhtin quotation above. Accordingly, the relation between environment and person cannot be of the cause-effect type. Instead, perezhivanie implies the movement of (intellectual, affective, bodily) consciousness towards consciousness. It is no longer the human being against nature, but the human being moving towards her own future. By adopting this category, therefore, psychological research on human consciousness necessarily moves from an empiricist stage to an inquiry into peak psychology, a Spinozist theme that became of central importance to Vygotsky.

**EXEMPLIFYING EPISODES FROM SECOND-GRADE MATHEMATICS LESSONS**

In contrast to empiricist and idealist definitions of experience, and consistent with a concrete human psychology (Vygotsky, 1989), perezhivanie, as a dialectical category, cannot be foisted upon but is to be deduced from concrete natural historical phenomena (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 356). Just as Vygotsky used a concrete example to exhibit the different perezhivaniya of three children living in the same home with their abusive mother, we elaborate on the definition given above by drawing from real-life classroom episodes that, as shown, form part of a larger developmental trajectory. The episodes thus allow us to discuss perezhivanie in the context of its subject matter, personal development; perezhivanie thereby is exhibited as a useful lens with import to both (educational) research and practice.

**Episode 1**

We are in a second-grade mathematics classroom, where three girls disagree about the nature of an object. This object is in a shoebox with a screened hole so that it can only be touched but not seen. Melissa firmly insists that the object has the form of a cube and shapes her plasticine into a cube; but Jane and Sylvia (Figure 1a), having molded slabs from their plasticine, suggest oth-

\textsuperscript{11} Although the perezhivanie of the Russian text is translated as “experience,” a footnote makes clear that “Bakhtin’s term for experience or experiencing is always perezhivanie (German Erleben or Erlebnis)” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 80).
erwise. They initially simply state what the object is they have felt and make their models. But as their impasse becomes apparent, Jane says, “I didn’t feel a cube,” and then continues, “because if I feel the top, it seems like it’s square, but if I feel the side, it seems like a rectangle.” A little later, Sylvia, too, describes what Melissa has to do to feel that the hidden object is not a cube. As Melissa reaches into the shoe box, Sylvia says, “now feel it?” while holding rubbing the palms of her two hands held together in the manner of a Catholic prayer configuration (Figure 1b). Melissa, in turn, provides description of her own, suggesting that “all” are the same while using a caliper configuration on three edges orthogonal to each other (Figure 1c).

In this lesson fragment, the three children exhibit reasoning in a form typical of mathematics. There is an action or claim followed by an account, which here exists in the form of a justification or instruction what to do to feel the shape of an object. But where does this practice derive from? Vygotsky suggests to employ the sociogenetic method, that is, to look for those relations with others where what appears to be a practice of an individual exists as a relation with others.

**Episode 2**

Eight days earlier, the teacher began the lesson saying that they would be doing geometry for the next three weeks. On that day, the class spent time pulling mystery objects from a black plastic bag and placing them on mats with existing objects to form a group or on a mat of their own thereby starting a new group. Following the teacher, who placed the first object, each child in the 22-student class had a turn. In none of the turns did the children immediately provide a reason for the placement of their objects. Instead, the conjunction of the action of grouping and the reason for the placement of an object existed here as social relation, as shown in Fragment 1.

**Fragment 1**

01 Sylvia: ((Sylvia pulls an object)) ((there are many ahs and ohs on the part of others))
((Sylvia places her mystery object on a mat with a cylinder))
02 (1.08) ((Sylvia retreats towards her place in circle))
03 Teacher: and tell us why you chose that category
04 (0.61)
05 Sylvia: because .hh um they are the same (1.02) because [.hh this one (0.25) has [it’s like a circle and IT has] _the_ same way
06 (0.36)
07 Teacher: okay
08 Sylvia: like that one
09 Teacher: anyone else want to add something to that?

Mathematical reasoning, the combination of a mathematical act (categorization) and its account (justification) here exists as the relation of two people, a relation that is realized in the sequence of turns 01, 03, and 05. It exists as rather than merely in the relation. Notably, Sylvia already is part of that relation, and the account of the preceding action (having placed an object on a mat)
is produced as the second part to the irreducibly social, jointly achieved phenomenon denoted by \{invitation \mid acceptance\}.

**ANALYSES THROUGH THE LENS OF PEREZHIVANIE**

In his lecture on the problem of the environment, Vygotsky (1994) discussed *perezhivanie* by means of the narrative of three children who, although living under the care of the same (drinking) mother and thus equal external conditions, the latter nonetheless exert “three different types of influence” (p. 341) on them. These differences lead to different developmental trajectories. The two episodes presented above similarly illustrate the fact that the same physical environment appears differently to the participants. In the case of the three girls (Episode 1), the mystery object in the box *feels* differently, as manifested in their models and what they communicate about it. In Episode 2, Sylvia, in returning to her seat, treats the task as complete, whereas, in inviting the statement of a reason, the teacher treats the task as incomplete. Most interestingly, the two episodes are genetically related, forming part of a larger trajectory of ontogenetic development. We draw on the episodes to discuss three main themes that are relevant to the definition of *perezhivanie* as a monist unit: (a) the identity of person and environment, (b) the need of a genetic method given the self-moving nature of the unit, and (c) the *intersubjective speech field* as a non-dualist approach to the problem of the internal vs. external, self vs. other, or intrasubjective vs. intersubjective.

**The Dynamic Person | Environment Unity/Unit**

In Vygotsky’s dialectical materialist approach, the person’s relation to the environment is never one-sided but has irreducible practical, intellectual, and affective dimensions. In hearing, as Sylvia hears in Episode 2, “and tell us why you chose that category,” we become intellectually aware that something has occurred, the choosing of a category, but that something is missing, which now is solicited by means of the invitation “tell us.” But this awareness also involves an affective tonality and disposition, manifested in the many and variously intonated interjections when Sylvia pulls her mystery object from the bag. Affect also manifests itself when the object feels differently in Melissa’s hands, an instance marked by a sheepish smile on her face and the puckering of her lips prior to reshaping of her plasticine. The intellectual and affective dimensions are evaluative, refracted manifestations of the practical activity. None of these can be reduced to the other—e.g., what people say about affect is not affect itself. Here, the relation between the person and the environment is not of two different entities that inter-act, but is *trans*actional, a term used for describing systems “without final attribution to ‘elements’ or other presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities,’ ‘essences,’ or ‘realities,’ and without isolation of presumptively detachable ‘relations’ from such detachable ‘elements’” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1999, p. 133). *Trans*action implies the impossibility of separating person and situation (environment) characteristics in performance, for each is involved in the specification of the respective other.

In both episodes, we observe participants in exchanges with others and the material setting. Both types of relations change the environment and consequently the learners’ *perezhivaniya*. For example, when the teacher says, “and tell us why you chose that category,” the situation is no longer the same as it was immediately before. There now is an invitation for doing something, which demands a reply. Sylvia now is accountable, subject and subjected to the unfolding of the social relation, which includes her as one constitutive moment. Similarly, in placing her mystery object next to the (yellow) cylinder already present, the physical arrangement of things in the center of the circle is changing in one way, whereas it would have been changed differently had Sylvia placed it on its own mat—which, as seen in other parts of this lesson, would have had immediate transactional consequences. Because Sylvia’s object also is a cylinder (from the teachers’ perspective), it will have to end up on the same mat as other cylinders. If an appropriate categorization is not made, there are teacher–student exchanges until the student places the
new object according to mathematical rules. Pragmatically speaking, therefore, *perezhivanie* captures the ever-changing and therefore dynamic aspects of the situation.

In acting (doing, speaking), Sylvia changes not only the environment but also herself: physically, because of the simple fact that acting goes with bodily changes; intellectually, because the field of objects and the possibilities to produce accounts about them change; and affectively, because of the (successful or unsuccessful) completion of her task, which has valence precisely because it involves an evaluative relation with an other. *Perezhivanija* thus enter in the history of personal development not in the form of an accumulation of subjective pieces of knowledge about objective facts, but as social practical, affective, and intellectual dispositions from which new *perezhivaniya* come to be had. We see this continuity in the first (second genetically) episode, where the *mathematical* practice of linking claim (that the figure is a cube) and account, which was first achieved at the end of the former episode, becomes the starting point.

**Self-movement vs. Cause–Effect**

*Perezhivanie*’s transactional nature requires us to abandon cause–effect explanations of the relation between environment and person: behavior cannot be accounted for by either internal or external causes. This is exemplified in the transcript: What the teacher will have done to the situation in and by saying “and tell us why you chose that category” can be established only after the response is completed, that is, when Sylvia will have replied. If Sylvia had said, “are you kidding me?” the teacher and others in the room would have been confronted with an environment very different from the one observed. Similarly, if the mystery object *felt* like a cube to Melissa, it is not because she made it feel in this way. Instead, the object (part of the environment) *afforded* particular movements to the sensing hand with and around it. Similarly, the feeling of the object does not emerge (effect) from an immediate (abstract, a-temporal) touch (cause), but rather from the moving of sense-touch towards sense-touch. In this case it is the concrete *act* of touching—which involves time and therefore self-difference and self-affection—that defines the person’s *perezhivanie*. In the case of speaking, the nature of the *social act*—the *transact*—is available only in a pair of speaking turns, where the first determines the nature of the second, but the second determines the nature of the first. Thus, there may be an {invitation | acceptance}, {invitation | rejection}, {query | reply}, and so on. The relation between turns is not a linguistic fact; it is a dialogical fact and, therefore, irreducibly social and psychological in nature.

Spinoza (2002, p. 219) conceives of substance as self-caused; and Nature (life) is self-moving because “in the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute” (p. 218). “By life,” Spinoza “understand[s] the force through which things persevere in their own being” (p. 197). *Perezhivanie* is a unit that contains all the characteristics of conscious life. This leads to the reflexive relation of life and consciousness: “Consciousness determines life (the image), but it derives itself from life, and forms its component: ergo life determines life [itself] through consciousness” (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2010b, p. 48). Such a position requires us to abandon cause–effect explications, because in a *transactional* systems view—Vygotsky (1987) calls it unit analysis—one part is not independent of another part of the unfolding whole. In a *perezhivanie*, any distinguishable part achieves personal significance only with regard to the whole psychological fact, which implies that we cannot comprehend our own doings before we actually *undergo* them. The possibility of regulating our own behavior thus always involves regulating our own behavior from without (Vygotsky, 1989), through the environment that is but part of us.

*Perezhivanie* enables theorizing phenomena of personal development dynamically, which change not because of factors external to the person–environment unity but because of its own internal dynamics. Across the two episodes, we see that what may be attributed to the individual children, who not only act (state the nature of the mystery object) but also provide accounts (give reasons), initially was a social relation. Thus, everything “possible to achieve at the end and as the result of the developmental process, is already available in the environment from the
very beginning” (Vygotsky, 1994, pp. 347–348). That is, the end result is not an external product of but is immanent to the initial social relation, a phenomenon known as prolepsis (Cole, 1996). In Episode 2, the specific mathematical reasoning already exists as the Sylvia–teacher relation even before reasoning in this way is characteristic of Sylvia’s behavior.

How does the future (i.e., the effect) affect the present (i.e., the cause) in the way Vygotsky and the concept of prolepsis suggest? We observe in the teacher’s statement—which may but does not have to be heard as a question—an orientation in this joint activity towards the future, towards the reply on the part of the student Sylvia. This orientation, objectively present in the situation, also transforms the situation: it now invites Sylvia to act in a particular way, directly addressing, in one or another way, this new situation. The future, the mathematical reasoning Sylvia displays in Episode 1, is present as the Sylvia-teacher relation in Episode 2. Both are participants in the “tense field of joint perezhivanie of a future action externalized for one another with all the means of cooperation” (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 26). This field, here, is produced as a conversation. The semantic field, in contrast to the perceptual field, is what allows us to project into the future, because “it precedes and anticipates any action with a real object, it links impressions and intuitions of the sense of an event or thing to words” (Zavershneva, 2010c, p. 63).

The Intersubjective Speech Field

55. Inner speech does not come after external. ... [S]peech ... is the undifferentiated unity of extern./inner speech. (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2010b, p. 55, emphasis added)

In his earlier work, Vygotsky emphasizes the difference between the external and internal. This distinction, in and with the Spinozist turn, acquires a new significance (Mikhailov, 2001). This is apparent in the 55th “thesis on a report by A.R. Luria” quoted above, where speech is described as an “undifferentiated unity of external and inner speech.” In the case of Sylvia’s categorizing her mystery object, we already see her as part of the social relation that is mathematical practice, a (social) practice that exists in the linking of an act of classification to its account. That practice is social in and as of the link; in the life of Sylvia, it first was a social relation. Thus, there is not something happening in the relation that then is transferred to the inside of the girl. This is apparent when we expand the transcription to account for the fact that for Sylvia to be able to reply to the teacher, she has to have attended to what the latter said.

Fragment 2

Teacher:  
Sylvia:  

This transcription makes apparent two important points. First, as Vygotsky points out in the last paragraphs of Thinking and Speech referencing L. Feuerbach, the word (bracketed) is a reality for two and impossible for one person. The utterance “and tell us why you chose that category” exists for the teacher and Sylvia (who replies). It actually is part of the objective environment, for both, though they might differ on what they really said or heard. Sylvia has already placed (categorized) her mystery object, to which the teacher has replied by inviting a rationalization. Now, in the reply part of her response, Sylvia provides the reason. In so doing, everything that we subsequently ascribe to Sylvia (in Episode 1)—the mathematical practice that ties classifica-
tory act and an account thereof—already is present within. It is within and outside simultaneously. Even the invitation is external and internal to Sylvia, for everyone else can hear what the teacher said because it is external, whereas the hearing of the invitation is within for each person.

The statement “and tell us why you chose that category?” manifests that there is something missing; and this missing part is solicited. It states that Sylvia has chosen a category as a fact. But in intonating the statement such as to be heard as a question (which it becomes in the reply), it also manifests that Sylvia’s earlier response has been insufficient. In replying, Sylvia provides something that could fill in—even though she may not be (is not likely) consciously aware of the lack as lack in the way we can hear it to be for the teacher. By inviting Sylvia to provide a reason, the teacher also evaluates the preceding act of categorization as insufficient. It is missing something: an account, which she now invites Sylvia to provide. Sylvia replies immediately, acting in an understanding way, even though she may not be consciously aware of the whole that she is becoming part of. Thus, Sylvia does not have to wonder about what the teacher has in mind because the latter makes available, in and through speaking, what is to be salient at that particular instant. Consistent with the Spinozist approach, there is a unity/identity of “the ‘inner’ individual subjectivity of the human mind and the ‘external’ objectivity of the things of existence that we are able to *perezhivanie* and perceive” (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 19).

Vygotsky writes in his notebooks, “The meaning of a word ... is not the thing that it replaces but a dialogue (the *listening-speaking function in oneself*), the relation between people [is] speech” (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2010a, p. 26). Sylvia’s turn, including the listening (highlighted) and speaking parts is that function to which Vygotsky orients us in this note. The transcription shows that the phrase “and tell us why you chose that category” is both the teacher’s and Sylvia’s. In the word, the teacher’s own, her “question,” is the accented reality of the current field of activity. For Sylvia, that same word is part of the other’s *perezhivanie*. In this way, the word makes possible a borderline situation in which the other, the alien, is identical with one’s own, and where what is one’s own is part of the perezhivanie of the other. Thus, “there is nothing other for us from the outset that would not be our own” because “the very existence of the mind is possible only at the borderline where there is a continual coming and going of one into the other” (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 20). This is indeed an intersubjective speech field, an intersubjective reality. In Vygotsky’s last works, this field supplanted “the idea of semiotic mediation” (Mikhailov, 2006, p. 35). Zavershneva (2010c), who has had access to Vygotsky’s private notebooks, suggests, “one gets the impression ... that the mechanisms of social mediation were not important to him in themselves, and that they did not represent the essence of man for him” (p. 70). In fact, the words used are not mediators, for reality together with words exist for Sylvia and for the teacher as subjectively their own. The things in shared activity “are *perezhivat* by the child as the jointly sensed and jointly thought attention of adults to himself, and then as the attention of his peers ... to him” (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 27). These things are not someone else’s, but “are *perezhivat* as his own affective, purposeful response to the plentitude and wholeness of Being as it addresses him” (p. 27).

With *perezhivanie*, the sign (word) is to be thought of as “an internal ... prop of the will, i.e., the subjective reality of an *inner voice*, born of its *externalization* for the Other, and thus also for oneself as for the Other within oneself” (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 17). As a result, the sign “is a universally significant, affectively *perezhivat* prop for the purposeful transformation of one’s own capacities for action; it is a prop for the *comprehending transformation* ... of oneself” (p. 17). The sign (the word being the most developed type) constitutes that dimension of *perezhivanie* that refracts the material aspects of the person–environment unity/identity. Thus, the sign does not function as a stimulus or stimulus-tool but instead “is something that abstracts from a given,

12 In that quotation, a differentiation is made between *perezhivanie* and perception. It would be more consistent to say: “that can appear in our *perezhivanie*.”
tangible situation; it ‘moves out’ into another content located above it and transforms the structure of the situation in accordance with that content” (El’konin, 1994, p. 23). The result is a semantic field [semantičeskoe pole] or sense-giving field [smyslovoe pole] distinguished from the visible field. The word manifests itself as “the externalized reality of our special, exclusively human inter-intrasubjectivity, which contains the perceived reality of the entire world outside us” (Mikhailov, 2004, p. 31).

CODA

In the foregoing, we exhibit ways of doing analyses through the lens of perezhivanie. By taking our starting point in the very last works Vygotsky produced, we can make some headway towards what he likened to the Promised Land that he was seeing but on which, when he entered the hospital where he died, he had not yet placed his foot (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2010b). In the preliminary works that were to prepare his entering the promised land, Vygotsky exhibits willingness to abandon or at least revise the outdated parts of his own previous thinking. In this paper, we touch on how notions such as internalization and mediation come to be seen in a new light when approached from his emerging monist project. Internalization becomes problematic because whatever environmental feature may be said to become internal already is internal to perezhivanie: all that is within already is outside us; mediation is problematic too, because no middle thing is possible in perezhivanie, where everything already is part of everything else (Mikhailov, 2001).

As a unit of consciousness, perezhivanie is not something that stands between (inter-) the person and the environment or somehow unites two different, co-existing things. Instead, it is a self-moving entity: a unit of life that unfolds and affects itself. As such, perezhivanie not only offers new challenges and opportunities for research on learning and development, but also constitutes a distinct view of the kind of concrete psychology that Vygotsky began to initiate. Thus, towards the end of his life, “the mechanisms of social mediation were not important to him in themselves ... [and] had to serve as a ladder to a new ‘peak psychology’” (Zavershneva, 2010c, p. 70). This concrete peak psychology—Vygotsky saw the “peak” standpoint as a way to go beyond Spinoza—“shows a human being in the full sense of the word. ... Ecce homo” (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2010b, p. 41). Peak psychology is not so much concerned with defining how perception or comprehension of the world are possible as it is with the kind of world that becomes possible for human beings, whose social lives are defined by ethics and freedom. It is a less intellectualized, more humanist psychology where personal development and the development of human culture are seen as two moments of a unitary system. This “represents a certain vision of man from the viewpoint of the fullness, the peak of his existence” (Zavershneva, 2010c, p. 70). Perezhivanie, because it is a unit representing fullness, is an important step towards such a concrete peak psychology.

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**Perezhivanie** as a theoretical concept for researching young children’s development*

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The phenomenon of *perezhivanie* has received increasing attention in recent years; however, an understanding of *perezhivanie* as a concept remains elusive. This paper discusses *perezhivanie* as a theoretical concept from within a cultural-historical framework and through this, the paper aims to foreground the significance of this concept for studying young children’s development. In this paper we show development through drama in both everyday life and in conditions specifically created for the study of children’s development, where we show the significance and power of *perezhivanie* in research. It is argued that *perezhivanie* as a concept productively contributes to the study of children’s development.

**Keywords**: *perezhivanie*, cultural-historical, drama, young children, early childhood, emotion

**INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of *perezhivanie* has received increasing attention; however, an understanding of *perezhivanie* as a concept remains elusive. According to Smagorinsky (2011), “*perezhivanie* thus far remains more a tantalizing notion than a concept with clear meaning” (p. 339). What is argued by Smagorinsky is that unless we determine the meaning of this concept more clearly, we put at risk Vygotsky’s theoretical legacy. This legacy problem has already been noted in the writings of Chaiklin (2003) but in relation to another concept – the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Chaiklin claims that to understand the role and place of the ZPD in Vygotsky’s theory,

... one must appreciate the theoretical perspective in which it appeared... That is, we need to understand what Vygotsky meant by ‘development’ in general, if we are going to understand what he meant by ‘zone of proximal development’ in particular. In this way, the reader can develop a generative understanding of the theoretical approach, which will be more valuable than a dictionary definition of the concept (Chaiklin, 2003, p.46).

In line with this argument, this paper aims to contribute to a generative understanding of the theoretical content and context of *perezhivanie*.

Central to the argument we make in this paper, is conceptualizing *perezhivanie* in relation to Vygotsky’s original theory of development, where drama was key for the process of development. We show this development in our paper through naturalistic everyday life transitions, such as starting school, as well as in specially created dramatic events in early childhood settings. In the latter part of the paper, the content of the concept *perezhivanie* are elaborated through empirical examples centered on:

1. *perezhivanie* as a refracting prism
2. *perezhivanie* as a unit of environmental and personal characteristics
3. *perezhivanie* as a unit of consciousness

In this paper we study the meanings of *perezhivanie* directly from Vygotsky’s original texts. We do this because there are a variety of ways that this term has been interpreted and used by re-

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searchers, leading to ongoing confusion, rather than clarification of this concept (Smagorinsky, 2011). Consequently, this paper contains many direct quotations taken from a variety of sources, including translated citations originally written in Russian.

**Perezhivanie in the original texts of Vygotsky**

In this section we begin with the original and classical definition of *perezhivanie* followed by quotations of Vygotsky. Two meanings of the word *perezhivanie* will be shown. We introduce the original definition of *perezhivanie* by Vygotsky and other scholars who were writing at the time, as well as the theorization of *perezhivanie* as a concept which appeared in 1930s. We show this so that a broader and more complete reading of Vygotsky’s thinking about the term *perezhivanie* can be determined and then elaborated in the latter part of this paper.

In 1931 Vygotsky defined *perezhivanie* as follows:

*Perezhivanie* (переживание) is a common name for direct psychological experience. From a subjective perspective, every psychological process is *perezhivanie*. In every *perezhivanie* we distinguish: firstly, an act, and secondly, the content of *perezhivanie*. The first is an activity related to the appearance of certain *perezhivanie*; the second is the content, the composition of what is experienced (Varshava & Vygotsky 1931, p. 128).

This umbrella definition is an “indefinite definition” (i.e., “every psychological process is *perezhivanie*”). However, this definition drew from a Psychological Dictionary and reflected the traditional classical meaning of the term *perezhivanie* as it existed in psychology at that time, having originated from Dilthey, Dewey and James. This meaning encompasses a variety of psychological phenomena; it is a notion, a phenomenological definition (“from a subjective perspective, every psychological process is a *perezhivanie*”). However, what is important is that the same word might mean a process (act, activity) and a content; in other words, *perezhivanie* is “How I am experiencing something” and “What I am experiencing.” In *The Psychology of Art* written in the beginning of the 1920s we also can find lots of places where *perezhivanie* is used with this meaning (see, for example, Vygotsky’s thinking about aesthetic experience, Vygotsky 1971; 1986).

In the *Lectures of Pedology* in 1933/34 (Vygotsky, 1994) *perezhivanie* as a concept is introduced.

...*perezhivanie* is a concept which allows us to study the role and influence of environment on the psychological development of children in the analysis of the laws of development (Vygotsky 1994, p. 343).

The meaning here is radically different from the first one. Firstly, *perezhivanie* here is presented as a *concept*, not a notion or a definition. Secondly, it is related to the process of *development*. Thirdly, it is related to the role of the *environment* on development. Finally, it has a strong reference to the *psychological laws* of development. It can be argued that *perezhivanie* as a concept allows us to study the process of development, which means that this concept is an *analytical tool*, and a *theoretical lens* for studying the process of development.

When the various meanings of *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky’s original texts are considered, then we have a complex picture. Meaning number 1 (P1) is *perezhivanie* as a common name of all psychological processes and experiences, which can be labeled an “ontological” or “phenomenological” meaning as it covers a huge variety of phenomena and reflects their ontological status and nature. Meaning number 2 (P2) is a theoretical concept related to the process of develop-

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13 Опыт (опыт) in the Russian original text.
ment, the role of the environment and the laws of development. P2 is a theoretical tool, analytical lens to study the process of development within a system of other concepts of cultural-historical theory. This relation is summarized in Figure 1 below.

\[
\text{Perezhivanie}
\]

\[
\text{Perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1)} \quad \text{Perezhivanie as a concept (P2)}
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\text{Perezhivanie as a process (P1.1)} \quad \text{Perezhivanie as a content (P1.2)}
\]

Figure 1. The different dimensions of perezhivanie

In this paper we only discuss perezhivanie as P2 i.e. as a concept. In order to achieve the goal of this paper, we begin our discussions in the next section by considering the dramatic character of human development, followed by a theoretical discussion of content of the concept of perezhivanie.

Development and drama

In order to understand the concept of perezhivanie, we must also understand Vygotsky’s conception of development. We begin our discussion by considering “development in general” (Chaiklin, 2003) and then we closely study Vygotsky’s intentions by examining how he wrote about the concept of perezhivanie, through an “analysis of the laws of development” as proposed by him (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 343).

Development in cultural-historical theory is viewed as a “path along which the social becomes the individual” (Vygotsky, 1998, p.198). The social environment (social interactions) are not factors, but they are the source of development. This is reflected in the general genetic law of cultural development:

...every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between the people as an intermental category, then within the child as a intramental category...Genetically, social relations, real relations of people, stand behind all the higher mental functions and their relations (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 106).

Two points are important here: First, higher mental functions do not appear in social relations, but as social relations; “every higher mental function was external because it was social before it became an internal strictly mental function; it was formerly a social relation” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 105). Even in being transformed from interpsychological to intrapsychological “they remain quasisocial.” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 106). So, “intrapsychological” is social by its origin and construction.

Second, development is not a linear process; it is a complex and contradictory process. These contradictions exist in a form of drama, dramatic events, collisions and confrontations between

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14 In Russian original it is interpsychological (интерпсихическая) and intrapsychological (интрапсихическая) (Vygotsky 1983, p. 145).
people. “The basic principle of the functioning of higher functions (personality) is social, entailing interaction of functions, in place of interaction between people. They can be most fully developed in the form of drama” (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p.59; Original emphasis). The social, interpsychological form of child’s higher mental functions is shown as a dramatic interaction between people; it was conceptualized by Vygotsky as a drama that was both intrapsychologically interpreted by the child, at the same time as being experienced by the child interpsychologically (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p. 69), resulting in the development of the child’s personality. Thus, the intrapsychological consists of internalized dramatic social interactions: “the dynamic of the personality is drama” (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p. 67). Here an abstract dialectical idea of a contradiction as a moving force of development obtains its concrete psychological content in the concept of the drama of life as a moving force in the development of human personality (Veresov, 2015).

The idea of the drama of life as a moving force in development can be observed historically over the course of humanity. Elkonin (2005) gives the example of children’s play and the conception of childhood as two societal conditions that changed the cultural trajectory of human development. He argues that historically children actively participated in the survival of the family unit, but as technologies advanced children needed to practice using miniature objects or toys, leading to the new cultural practice of children’s play. Major societal changes, such as expecting children to attend formal schooling, creates new conditions for children which may be dramatic, and which may lead to development (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2013).

In the sections that follow, a further discussion on the content of the concept of perezhivanie in relation dramatic nature of human development is presented.

**Perezhivanie as a refracting prism**

In the chapter of *The Problem of the Environment*, Vygotsky (1994) introduces the idea of perezhivanie as a prism. We introduce in this section two references to perezhivanie written by Vygotsky that focused on perezhivanie as a refracting prism. In the first example, perezhivanie is discussed in relation to the social environment as a source of a child’s development:

...perezhivanie, arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child. Therefore, it is not any of the factors момент in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors момент refracted through the prism of the child's...perezhivanie (Vygotsky 1994, p. 339-340).

Here Vygotsky introduces the idea of the child’s perezhivanie as a prism which refracts environmental moments and determines the influence of these environmental moments on the course of child development. It is possible to interpret this quotation of the prism as a metaphor. We will argue that the focus on the prism is misplaced. Rather attention should be directed to the refraction process. The principle of refraction challenges the principle of reflection that was a foundational basic principle of psychology at the time. If a prism is a metaphor it specifically challenges a mirror as a metaphor of the principle of reflection; mirror reflects, prism refracts. The light goes through the prism, the child emotionally and intellectually lives through the social situation.

In line with this argument, we look closely at another extract taken from the same text (Vygotsky, 1994), which we believe highlight the developmental content of the concept of perezhivanie:

To state a certain, general, formal position it would be correct to say that the environment determines the development of the child through perezhivanie of the environment;...the child is a part of the social situation, and the relation of the child to
the environment and the environment to the child occurs through perezhivanie ... of
the child himself; the forces of the environment acquire a controlling significance
because the child perezhivayet them (Vygotsky 1998, p. 294).

We can see this in specifically designed classroom activities in schools. For example,
MacKenzie and Veresov (2013) give the example of a teacher organizing a school excursion on
a bus to a church, where the children each have the same bus ride to and from the church. The
children are invited to draw a picture of this excursion. MacKenzie and Veresov (2013) show
through the responses of the children in their drawings that different perezhivanie of the chil-
dren could be identified. For example, one child’s drawing was of a picture of the bus; whilst
another child’s drawing was of the church, even though both labeled their drawings as “I went
to church today on a bus”. This example also shows how each has a different perezhivanie
through which the activity was refracted.

Development is a complex dialectical process of how the social becomes the individual; but the
developing individual is always a part of the social situation and the relation of the individual to
the environment and the environment to the individual occurs through the perezhivaniya of the
individual. This reading of Vygotsky’s writing draws attention to the role and place of the con-
cept of perezhivanie and the principle of refraction in understanding of a dialectical character of
development. Conceptualizing development in this way allows us to investigate how certain
social situations becomes a social situation of development. Without the concept of perezhivanie
and the principle of refraction, the concept of the social situation of development remains incomplete. That is, any empirical study of a social situation of development of a child
will remain incomplete without the study of child’s perezhivaniya. For example, Vygotsky illustra-
tes this through discussing how three children from the same family, who experience the
same social situation, will through their individual social situation of development, experience
this same situation differently. That is, each child’s perezhivanie will be different (Vygotsky

Contemporary research has also shown this, whereby four children in poverty, were shown to
respond differently to their circumstances (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2013). For example, as the four
children wake up in the morning, preparing to go to school and child care, they express that they
are hungry and wish to eat breakfast. However, when no breakfast food is found in the fridge,
the eldest child (6 years) does not eat, but tries to support his mother by helping her take what
food is available, and turn this into lunches. The second youngest child (5 years), searches the
fridge and then screams that he is hungry, leading to a dispute between the mother and child,
which results in the child rolling on the floor in fear and crying. The third child (2 years) con-
tinues to ask to eat the school snacks that had been packed, nagging her until the mother takes
them out of the lunch box and gives them out, whilst the infant waits silently in the stroller, be-
cause she is given a bottle of milk by the eldest child. Each child experiences the same situation
differently. Each has a different perezhivanie through which the morning routine is refracted,
creates the unique social situation of development of each child. Life course events such as the-
se, are only one way to explain perezhivanie as a refracting prism. Perezhivanie, as is discussed
here, is a prism through which the social environment is refracted, and which in turn brings de-
velopmental qualities and change the course of the child’s development.

In the example above, poverty created the conditions for the eldest child to take on the role of
helper. He was performing the role of the mother, anticipating what was needed (giving bottle to
the baby). The morning breakfast routine over time acted as the source of development. The
example given, was a dramatic event, but it also showed how the small transitions in everyday
life can be critical moments of perezhivanie. Breakfast routines are not usually dramatic or con-
frontational, and as such, they are usually not a source of development for children. There is a
special type of perezhivanie that is being refracted in the example, a perezhivanie of an existing
social dramatic event (breakfast) which appears as a confrontation; as a social situation in crisis.
We have termed this dramatic perezhivanie.
An example of a specially created social dramatic event is playworlds (Lindqvist, 1995). In using children’s literature or emotionally charged fairytales, which contain dramatic moments, children and teachers together create imaginary dramatic situations. Lindqvist (1995) suggests that the stories emotionally “fuel and inspire the imagination of both children and adults” (p. 72) where the “Children are inside the problem situation and emotionally involved” (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 80). Playworlds therefore act as a source of development for the children. Playworld seek to generate dramatic moments that are refracted through the child’s perezhivanie, and this brings qualitative changes to child’s mental functions and therefore brings changes to how the child becomes aware, interprets and relates to the sociocultural environment. This in turn, reorganizes the whole social situation of development. Social events as dramatic moments, are refracted through a child’s perezhivanie and these dramatic moments produce qualitative changes and “turning points” in a child’s individual developmental trajectory. In this sense, the concept of perezhivanie is an analytical tool for examining the dialectics of evolutorial and revolutinary aspects of development, as well as the dialectics of the social and the individual.

Such dramatic events, socially and culturally created crises, are interesting to analyze as they might give very rich empirical material for the analysis of the critical “turning points” in the course of development which bring revolutionary changes to the whole system of a child’s higher mental functions.

**Perezhivanie** as a unit of personal and environmental characteristics

It was discussed in the previous section that the social situation of development is a system of unique and dynamic relationship of a child with her/his social environment, which occurs through perezhivaniya. As such, the social situation of development exists as a unique and dynamic unity of the child and the social environment. Yet, what is the psychological content of this unity? In this section we build upon the literature by discussing the theoretical content of the concept of perezhivanie as a unit of individual and environmental characteristics in relation to child development. To achieve this goal, we begin with two references to Vygotsky’s texts which are considered as foundational for understanding of the concept of perezhivanie as a unit.

The first quotation is from *The crisis at age seven*. The English translation shows perezhivanie as the unity of the environment and personality (Vygotsky 1998, p. 294). However, comparison with the original text written in Russian (Vygotsky 1984, p. 382) shows a different picture. For instance,

> A unit\(^\text{15}\) can be noted in the study of personality and environment. This unit\(^\text{16}\) in psychopathology and psychology has been called perezhivanie. The child's perezhivanie is also this kind of very simple unit\(^\text{17}\) about which we must not say that in itself it represents the influence of the environment on the child or the individuality of the child himself; perezhivanie is the unit\(^\text{18}\) of the personality and the environment as it is represented in development.

The problem with this translation is the translation of the Russian word единица (*edinitsa*, unit), as unity. For this to make sense we must look at the differences between unit (*edinitsa*) and the unity (*edinstvo*).

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\(^{15}\) Unity in English text.

\(^{16}\) Unity in English text.

\(^{17}\) Unity in English text.

\(^{18}\) Unity in English text.
The unity (единство [edinstvo]), is used when we speak about a complex whole, a complex system consisting of a number of parts, components, elements etc. One of the meanings of the term, unit (единица [edinitsa]), is a part, a component, or an element of a certain complex whole. In other words, unity (единство) is used in relation to the whole, whereas unit is often related to the parts of the whole. If we put it in a general way, we could say that a certain system (the complex whole) in its unity (единство) consists of certain units (единица). From this follows that in this quote Vygotsky does not speak of perezhivanie as a unity, but as a unit of personality and the environment.

Very often in English translations, all these terms – parts, components, units, elements – are used as synonyms. However, Vygotsky clearly distinguished two main types of analysis in psychology which underlie two main approaches to the investigation of mental formations (Vygotsky, 1987). The first of these approaches is the decomposition of the complex mental whole into its elements. This type of analysis can be compared with a chemical analysis of water in which water is decomposed into hydrogen and oxygen. The essential feature of this form of analysis is that its products are of a different nature than the whole from which they were derived. The elements lack the characteristics inherent in the whole (Vygotsky 1987, p. 45).

Vygotsky explains that a psychology that decomposes the complex mental whole into its elements in an attempt to explain its characteristics will search in vain for the unity that is characteristic of the whole. These characteristics are inherent in the phenomenon only as a unified whole. “When the whole is analyzed into its elements, these characteristics evaporate. In his attempt to reconstruct these characteristics, the investigator is left with no alternative but to search for external, mechanical forms of interaction between the elements” (Vygotsky 1987, p.45).

The key word here is “mechanical forms of interaction between the elements”; here Vygotsky speaks about two types of systems (complex wholes) – mechanical systems and organic (living, developing) systems and about two types of connection within these systems – mechanical connections and organic connections. To support this statement we can refer to Vygotsky’s own words: “Thus, the detection of the significant connection between the parts and the whole, the ability to view the mental process as an organic connection of a more complex integral process – this is dialectical psychology's basic task” (Vygotsky, 1987, p.115).

In contrast to the element, the unit (1) possesses all the basic characteristics of the whole, and (2) is a “vital and further indivisible part of the whole” (Vygotsky 1982, p. 16).

The key to the explanation of the characteristics of water lies not in the investigation of its chemical formula but in the investigation of its molecule and its molecular movements. In precisely the same sense, the living cell is the real unit of biological analysis because it preserves the basic characteristics of life that are inherent in the living organism (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 46).

Human mind is not a mechanical system by its nature; it develops as a complex organic system and because of this it should not be analyzed by elements and mechanical forms of interaction between the elements. Perezhivanie represents the minimal unit of the whole, the organic unity of the personality and the environment as it is represented in its process of development.

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19 For example in Russian “consciousness is a unity of affect and intellect” is “сознание есть единство аффекта и интеллекта”.

20 Organical here is not a synonym of biological, according to Hegel’s tradition organical systems are systems which develop by generation of new organs. This is too a complex issue to discuss in this paper, so we leave this for future discussions.

21 Here Vygotsky’s words “далее неразложимыми живыми частями этого единства” (further indivisible part of the whole) were translated as “irreducible part of the whole” (Vygotsky, 1987, p.46).
The second foundational quotation is from *The Problem of Environment*:

Perezhivanie is a unit [edinitsa] where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced – perezhivanie is always related to something which is found outside the person - and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e., all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie.... So, in perezhivanie we are always dealing with an indivisible unity [edinstvo] of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the perezhivanie (Vygotsky 1994, p.342; Original emphasis).

At first glance, it looks controversial as perezhivanie is presented as a unit (in the first sentence) and as a unity (in the last sentence). However, there is no contradiction here. In a molecule of water we deal with an indivisible unity of oxygen and hydrogen. This makes a molecule of water a unit of analysis of the whole unity (water). The living cell is a unit of biological analysis as in this unit we are dealing with a unity of the living organism as it preserves the basic characteristics of life that are inherent in the living organism. In line with this, perezhivanie is not the unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics; it is a unit, a vital and further indivisible part of the unity of personal and situational characteristics, which retains all its basic features and qualities. Perezhivanie itself is not the unity, but in perezhivanie we are dealing with an indivisible unity of personal and situational characteristics like in a molecule of water we deal with the unity of oxygen and hydrogen (water).

The social situation of development is a unique relation of the child to the environment. What makes it unique is a unique unity of environmental components and child’s personal characteristics. However, it should not be treated as a system which consists of the child and the social environment as interacting elements. Interactions should not be treated as mechanical forms of interaction between elements. Dialectical and holistic understandings require a logic of analysis by units and their organic relations within the whole, rather than a logic of elements and mechanical interactions. Perezhivanie is such a unit.

Research which uses perezhivanie as the unit of analysis seeks to identify what is the smallest unit that captures the unity of environmental and personal characteristics in a given situation.

**Perezhivanie as a unit of human consciousness**

The final aspect of perezhivanie that our close study highlights, is perezhivanie as a unit of human consciousness. Here again we begin with the foundational quotation from Vygotsky.

In modern theory, perezhivanie is introduced as a unit of consciousness, that is, a unit in which the basic properties of consciousness are given as such, while in attention and in thinking, the connection of consciousness is not given. Attention is not a unit of consciousness, but is an element of consciousness in which there is no series of other elements, while the unity of consciousness as such disappears, and perezhivanie is the actual dynamic unit of consciousness, that is, the consciousness consists of perezhivanie (Vygotsky, 1984, p.382).

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22 Everywhere in this quotation perezhivanie is translated as experience (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 294).
23 “unity” in English translation.
24 “unity” in English translation.
25 “unity” in English translation.
26 “actual dynamics of the unity of consciousness” in English translation.
The English text does not say anything about *perezhivanie* as a unit of human consciousness, it positions *perezhivanie* as a unity and therefore the difference between “unity”, “unit” and “element” is not captured in the English translation. The original Russian text gives a fuller picture of *perezhivanie*. With a more comprehensive reading of unit, unity and elements in the original text, it can be argued that, 1) consciousness is a unity and *perezhivanie* is a unit of consciousness; 2) attention and thinking are not units since the basic properties of consciousness are not given, they are elements of consciousness, whereas *perezhivanie* is a dynamic unit of consciousness.

Given that *perezhivanie* is a unit of the environmental and personal characteristics as discussed in the previous section of this paper (we could name it Unit 1 for clarity), and it shown by Vygotsky to be a unit of human consciousness (Unit 2), could we conclude that in Vygotsky’s understanding consciousness and the unity of environmental and personal characteristics is the same unity? Or to put it another way: is human consciousness and the unity of environmental and personal characteristics one and the same complex living whole? And, if not, how is it possible that *perezhivanie* is a unit of analysis of both? How is it possible that the same unit is a unit of two different complex wholes (unities)?

We do not have any evidence in Vygotsky’s published texts on the similarity between the two unities. Yet, there is a difference. It seems the way to recognize the difference is to look at a concept as a result of a generalization: “At any stage of its development, the concept is an act of generalization” (Vygotsky 1987, p. 169). In other words, concepts are the result of generalizing, that is, conceptualizing a certain phenomenological reality. A concept has its theoretical content; however, conceptualization never happens in an empty space. What we conceptualize is not less important than how we conceptualize.

![Figure 2. *Perezhivanie* as a phenomenon and a concept](image)

What we suggest is a model of two levels where Level 1 is a phenomenological level, that is, *perezhivanie* as a psychological phenomena (P1.1 and P1.2). Level 2 is a level of two conceptualizations of these phenomena. In other words, the concept of *perezhivanie* in cultural-historical theory is a result of the conceptualization of two psychological phenomena *in relation to the process of sociocultural genesis of higher mental functions*. Taking *perezhivanie* as a concept, as an analytical tool gives the opportunity to study *perezhivanie* not as phenomenon we can observe and analyze, not as a psychological process which exists within the individual, but to study *perezhivanie* as, 1) a prism which refracts certain aspects of the social environment and therefore to identify which aspects of the social environment influence the course of child development, and how they were refracted; 2) a unique unit of individual and environmental components of a certain concrete unique social situation of development which is the initial moment...
that defines the future trajectories of the development of higher mental functions, and; 3) a unit of consciousness, as a developing whole where changes of a child’s concrete perezhivaniya bring dynamic changes to the whole organization of consciousness.

Perezhivanie discussed in this way, as a unit of human consciousness, can be shown through the process of role-play, where children have a double subjectivity (Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2010). Children feel themselves as players inside the play, whilst also being children above the play, directing the play. It is through the process of both living the rules and roles of their society, and role-playing these, that they move closer to reality, because they begin to make conscious an understanding of how their world works (Elkonin, 2005). For example, children can be upset in their role-play because they are being captured and put into a dungeon, but happy that they are playing. They are both happy and sad, and have to think consciously about their emotional state. The children’s realization of the situation, where they both experience imprisonment, and consciously consider their situation, can potentially lead to a re-organization of their thinking, because they begin to understand and think with a new concept, freedom.

The specific role of perezhivanie related to everyday or specially created dramatic events, brings revolutionary changes to a child consciousness, as a reorganization of the relationship between the child and her/his social environment which in turn brings changes to the whole social situation of development, signifying turning points in the individual trajectory of the development of the child. For instance, in specifically created conditions of introducing digital technologies to children by teachers, where children video or audio record the role-play of fairytales, and where the teacher supports the children to reproduce their role-play as a digital movie (Fleer, under review), children also consciously consider concepts. Perezhivanie as a prism refracts certain aspects of the social environment that present themselves when children begin to use the digital tools to represent their play. This allows the researchers to observe children, and to identify which aspects of specifically created conditions could be influencing the course of children’s development. In their digital play, the children need to collectively enter into the same imaginary situation and to coordinate their actions, and to socially negotiate how the play is to proceed, always keeping in mind the audience who will view the digital movie, and the plot sequence. In this digital play context, the researcher can examine what might be the unique unit of individual and environmental characteristics, as well as the unique social situation of development of the participating children, in order to determine what might be the initial moment that defines the future trajectories of development of higher mental functions for the children in the study. The digital tools used in play, do create the conditions for children to consciously work with new concepts (e.g. literacy), and this becomes visible in the process of successfully reproducing the role-play into digital form. In this kind of study design, the researcher seeks to examine the child’s perezhivaniya as units of consciousness, in order to know how the digital play brings dynamic changes to the whole organization of consciousness of the child.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of perezhivanie can act as a powerful theoretical tool for researching the role of environment in mental development which allows us to understand the social environment as a source of development. It clarifies and enriches the theoretical content of social environment as a source of development demonstrating that only those components of the social environment that are refracted through the perezhivaniya of the individual are of developmental significance.

The social situation of development is a unique relation of the child to the environment, but what makes it unique is that the relation of the child to the environment and the environment to the child occurs through perezhivaniya. This makes perezhivanie an important and decisive component of the social situation of development.

Perezhivanie is the personal way of experiencing a dramatic event. It is the form in which this dramatic event is refracted and experienced by an individual. The unique organization and hierarchy of higher mental functions is the result of the unique dramatic interpsychological colli-
sions that have happened in the life of the human being and of the process of that human being overcoming them; the intrapsychological result of the individual’s unique developmental trajectory. In overcoming social dramatic collisions (the dramas of life) a human being creates his/her unique architecture of personality.

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“The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape.”

Andy Blunden

In my initial contribution I characterized perezhivanie as an integral concept, despite the fact that at least two English words – “experience” and “catharsis” – were needed to encompass its meaning. However, reading the contributions to this volume one is led to the impression that at least three distinct concepts are indexed by the Russian word perezhivanie.

The first is the word as used in everyday Russian language and literature, which was imported into mainstream psychology, with a meaning such that (as Veresov tells us), Vygotsky could say: “from a subjective perspective, every psychological process is a perezhivanie.” Mainstream therapists to this day regard perezhivaniya, in this sense, as the basic substance of their work, and Stanislavskii adopted this phenomenological concept of perezhivaniya as units for the work of an actor, although construing perezhivanie as an activity rather than as a moment of passive subjection.

Secondly, as Veresov outlines for us, in his last period of work, Vygotsky took perezhivaniya to be units of the development of the personality, in contradistinction to the influence of the child’s genetic inheritance. Here ‘perezhivanie’ indexes not just any psychological process, but only those dramatic experiences which are significant for the development of the personality. What is more, Vygotsky explicitly included in the concept of perezhivanie those aspects of the objective world which are the content of the perezhivanie rather than taking perezhivanie from a purely subjective, phenomenological perspective. It is this meaning of the word which has been most widely known to English speakers because of its use in Problem of the Environment.

Clarà points out that the concept of perezhivanie which is theorized by Fedor Vasilyuk (1988), is a “semiotic transformation of Vygotsky’s perezhivanie.” “[T]he fact that Vasilyuk and Vygotsky both use the term perezhivanie is … not due to the fact that they were both naming the same phenomenon; however, it is not entirely fortuitous either, since they were naming two different but related phenomena” (p. 17 above). Vasilyuk himself contrasts the concept of perezhivanie which he uses with the first, the concept of perezhivanie known to mainstream psychology:

Let me repeat that the term “perezhivanie” is used here not in the sense most familiar in psychological literature — that of a direct, usually emotional form in which the content of his consciousness is given to the subject — but to denote a special inner activity or inner work by means of which an individual succeeds in withstanding various (usually painful) events and situations in life, succeeds in regaining the mental equilibrium which has been temporarily lost — succeeds, in short, in coping with a crisis. (1988, p. 15)

So Vasilyuk does share with Vygotsky and Stanislavskii the fundamental conception of perezhivanie even in its everyday and phenomenological senses, though as activity rather than as passive contemplation, in the sense in which this distinction was made by Fichte, Hegel and Marx.

Third is the meaning of perezhivanie known to Russian life and literature which I learnt from Robbins and Kotik-Friedgut, in which perezhivaniya are not just any experience, but dramatic experiences, and Veresov highlights this aspect of the concept of perezhivaniya in Vygotsky’s later work. In Veresov’s view (and I agree), for Vygotsky “drama was key for the process of development.”

What are we to make of these different but related concepts?

The specific connotations, nuances and contexts with which the word ‘perezhivanie’ is deployed by Vygotsky, Vasilyuk and others are important for understanding each of the psychological
systems in which it figures. However, perezhivanie must be seen as a concept which encompasses the phenomenological, dramatic and cathartic phases of its development. Perezhivanie is not a sum of different psychological functions, but an integral form of activity from which various psychological functions are differentiated. But unless perezhivanie is understood as a mode of activity, simultaneously objective and subjective, the conception of perezhivanie is not just different, but deficient.

Clarà assures us that in Problem of the Environment, Vygotsky is not talking about the same thing as Vasilyuk is when talking about an adult patient at his psychotherapeutic practice. True. But it is also important to understand that they are talking about the same thing. It is not a question of an ambiguous word, but of a concrete concept of psychological development.

**A concept as a process and path of development**

Before Hegel, concepts were understood to consist of the set of attributes which were necessary and sufficient for an object to be subsumed under the concept. On this basis the objects found within a field of study could be categorized by genus and type. Hegel gave us a completely different approach. For Hegel, all the concepts relevant to a domain of science are unfolded from a foundational concept (form of activity) and therefore stand in developmental relations to one another.

This is the method Marx exhibited in Capital.

In Capital, Marx resolved a number of riddles in political economy when, rather than providing a series of definitions and categories, he began his critique from the concept of commodity and from the concept of commodity, derived money, wages, labor-power and capital all as forms of commodity.

Marx explained in the Grundrisse how this basic idea facilitates an understanding of history:

> “Bourgeois society is the most advanced and complex historical organization of production. The categories which express its relations, and an understanding of its structure, therefore, provide an insight into the structure and the relations of production of all formerly existing social formations the ruins and component elements of which were used in the creation of bourgeois society. ... The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape.” (Marx, 1858, p. 102)

And Vygotsky adopted this same approach:

> “I proceeded from the idea that the well-developed forms … provide the key to the underdeveloped ones.” (Vygotsky, 1928, p. 319)

Every minor interaction which makes up the substance of day to day life is a drama, albeit an unremarkable and even forgettable drama. Certain conditions mark out some of those experiences such that they stand out from the background of experience and come to figure in the person’s development, that is, they become perezhivaniya, not just in the common phenomenological sense, but in the sense with which Vygotsky was concerned in his studies of child development. Sometimes such perezhivaniya are easily ‘processed’ and sometimes they challenge a person’s whole conception of themselves and the meaning of their life, and then the perezhivanie becomes material for the psychotherapist. Thus there is a developmental relation between perezhivaniya which manifest in qualitatively different phenomena.

Further, as the infant develops into the child and the child into the adult and the adult into the elder, the capacity to process and resolve perezhivaniya develops, as does every other aspect of the person’s psychological activity. The perezhivaniya of a child cannot be the same as those of an adult.
It is in managing the catharsis of the mature adult endeavoring to transform critical experiences in their life and give it a new meaning which will make life possible again, that the key to understanding the everyday experiences and development of the child can be fully grasped, and vice versa.

I believe that our understanding of each of these processes, and of the work of those writers who focused on this or that level of development of _perezhivanie_, is enhanced by understanding them _all as perezhivaniya_, realized under different conditions.

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The many lives of the word *perezhivanie*

Marc Clarà

**INTRODUCTION**

The different papers collected in this volume highlight the many lives of the word *perezhivanie*: how it fuels different concepts, how it is central to different approaches, how it is useful for different aims and relevant for different research interests. With each of these lives, one has the feeling that a door has been opened, that we are taking the first steps along a series of amazing, re-discovered paths. It is an exciting moment, and the concepts of *perezhivanie* are increasingly alive.

However, there is some danger in this moment, too. The semantic richness, the multiple connotations, even the fogginess of the concept of *perezhivanie* have all been very important in its (Western) infancy, as they are what allowed the idea of *perezhivanie* to arise in the first place and find strength in so many different lives. However, should this fogginess continue for too long after the concept’s infancy, it could seriously hinder the future development of the many currently open paths. Whether the concept of *perezhivanie* is already strong enough to consider its infancy over, I do not know. However, a special issue like this one does suggest that it has acquired significant strength and that, therefore, beginning to clear up the fogginess surrounding the concept might be better for its future scientific development than continuing to merge its many connotations in a single term. Accordingly, in this commentary, I will try to distinguish between the different phenomena that, in this volume, and according to my reading, are referred to with the word *perezhivanie*.

**Perezhivanie: a tentative glossary**

In my reading (and I apologize in advance for any misinterpretations), the different papers in this special issue have basically noted four different phenomena that are sometimes referred to as *perezhivanie*. They might be considered four different meanings of the word. To distinguish between these meanings of *perezhivanie*, I will give them four different tentative names: experiencing-as-contemplation; experiencing-as-struggle; fantasy-based experiencing-as-struggle; and m-*perezhivanie*.

**Experiencing-as-contemplation**

Experiencing-as-contemplation refers to passive subjective contemplation of the external world (Vasilyuk, 1988), i.e., my contemplation of how the world affects me. According to Vasilyuk (1998) and Veresov and Fleer (this issue), this is the traditional meaning of *perezhivanie* in psychology. It is the meaning that Vygotsky gives to *perezhivanie* in the *Psychological Dictionary* (Veresov & Fleer, this issue), in some parts of *The Crisis at Age Seven* (as argued by González Rey, this issue), and in some parts of *The Psychology of Art* (as argued by Veresov & Fleer, this issue). In my reading, this is also close to the meaning that, according to Blunden (this issue), Dewey gives to the concept of *experience* (in this issue, Veresov & Fleer also note the relationship between Dewey’s *experience* and this meaning of *perezhivanie*).

**Experiencing-as-struggle**

Experiencing-as-struggle is the inner work that, faced with a critical situation, a person conducts in order to regain psychological equilibrium. This is the phenomenon that Vasilyuk (1988) calls *perezhivanie* (translated as *experiencing*). In my paper, I examined this phenomenon in some detail, and, in my understanding, Blunden (this issue) also worked out essentially this same meaning for the word *perezhivanie*. 
Fantasy-based experiencing-as-struggle

In this special issue, Veresov and Fleer and Ferholt and Nilssen have written about a very interesting strategy to promote experiencing-as-struggle in children. As mentioned earlier, experiencing-as-struggle begins with a critical situation. This introduces an educational paradox, because while experiencing-as-struggle is thought to drive children’s development, it is not at all desirable for children to be faced with critical situations. To solve this paradox, some authors use playworlds in which, through fantasy, children can be faced with critical situations and conduct processes of experiencing-as-struggle. For example, Veresov and Fleer (this issue) write that “in using children’s literature or emotionally charged fairytales, which contain dramatic moments, children and teachers together create imaginary dramatic situations”, so that “children are inside the problem situation and emotionally involved” (Hakkarainen, cited in Veresov and Fleer, this issue). In my view, this is basically the same meaning that Vygotsky gives the word catharsis (a term also discussed in this volume by Blunden and by Ferholt and Nilssen) in The Psychology of Art. Sometimes, the word perezhivanie is used to refer to this phenomenon (e.g., Ferholt & Nilssen, this issue), which can actually be seen as a type of experiencing-as-struggle; however, I think the fact that experiencing-as-struggle is conducted in a fantasy world adds special and interesting connotations, as well as considerable educational potential, and would thus consider it to be a different meaning of perezhivanie, one that might be called fantasy-based experiencing-as-struggle.

M-perezhivanie

I propose using the term m-perezhivanie to refer to the special type of meaning that mediates processes of experiencing-as-struggle and is transformed when these processes are successful. The “m” before the term perezhivanie is intended to denote the ideas of “meaning” and “mediator.” I have argued that Vygotsky uses the word perezhivanie to refer to this type of meaning in The Problem of the Environment. In this volume, Veresov and Fle, González Rey, Roth and Jornet, and, on some occasions, Ferholt and Nilssen also use the word perezhivanie in basically the same way (although Ross and Jornet would probably not agree that it is a mediator, since their proposed development of Vygotsky’s ideas questions the concept of mediation itself).

When I say that m-perezhivanie is a type of meaning, I am not referring to meaning as opposed to sense. An m-perezhivanie is not just a manifested meaning (or, to use Greimas’s terms, it does not refer only to the surface level of meaning). When I say that an m-perezhivanie is a meaning, I am referring to meaning as a whole semiotic phenomenon, in all its depth, which includes both the sense (at the deepest level) and the manifested meaning (at the surface). In other words, to quote Vygotsky (1987, p.285), I am talking about meaning as “a microcosm of consciousness, related to consciousness like a living cell is related to an organism, like an atom is related to the cosmos. The meaningful word is a microcosm of human consciousness.” From this perspective, when I say that the m-perezhivanie is transformed in successful experiencing-as-struggle, I do not mean that only the manifested meaning (the surface) is transformed, but also the deeper levels, including what I understand as the sense. In my opinion, when Ferholt and Nilssen say, at the start of their paper in this volume, that “Sobchack and Vygotsky describe and portray the means of eliciting the aesthetic form of consciousness that is a perezhivanie,” they are basically concerned with the transformation of the manifested meaning (the surface level or form) of m-perezhivaniya. In a complementary way, my paper focused more on the transformation of deeper levels of m-perezhivaniya. In a similar vein, González Rey (this issue) is especially concerned with the deepest level of meaning, which is what I understand as the sense. A discussion of what sense is would require even more space than a discussion of what perezhivanie is, but I believe that González Rey’s concept of subjective sense could be connected to this idea of the deepest level of a meaning, and that the relationships he works out between subjective sense and subjective configurations may point to a promising path between meaning and personality. However, it should be stressed that the m-perezhivanie is not synonymous with the manifested meaning, nor is it synonymous with sense; an m-perezhivanie is a meaning, un-
understood as a unit of consciousness, with all its levels of depth. The manifested meaning and the sense are two different levels of a single m-perezhivanie. This concept of m-perezhivanie as a meaning may also offer clues about the interesting questions posed by Veresov and Fleer (this issue):

Given that perezhivanie is a unit of environmental and personal characteristics (...) and it [has been] shown by Vygotsky to be a unit of human consciousness, could we conclude that in Vygotsky’s understanding consciousness and the unity of environmental and personal characteristics is the same unity? (...) And, if not, how is it possible that perezhivanie is a unit of analysis of both? How is it possible that the same unit is a unit of two different complex wholes (unities)?

Here, I would highlight that, in The Problem of the Environment, Vygotsky says that “Perezhivanie is a unit [edinitsa] where [emphasis added], on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented (...) and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this” (Vygotsky, cited in Veresov & Fleer, this issue). So, in my understanding, and taking the argument of Veresov and Fleer, Vygotsky does not say that perezhivanie is a unit of the environmental and personal characteristics, but rather that perezhivanie is a unit of consciousness, and that in this unit, the environmental and personal characteristics are represented as a unity. Vygotsky also says that meaning is a unit of consciousness. All this can thus be better understood when considering that perezhivanie (m-perezhivanie) is a special type of meaning where environmental and personal characteristics are represented as a unity; and as a meaning, the m-perezhivanie is a unit of consciousness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

González Rey (this issue) writes that “I do not believe that perezhivanie is a useful concept for psychology, although it retains great importance in the history of cultural-historical psychology.” This raises the issue of whether the word perezhivanie will still be useful once its (Western) infancy has passed or, instead, should be abandoned and remembered as the historical origin of several different modern concepts that can trace at least some of their origins to it. My view is that we are coming to a moment when the many lives of the word perezhivanie must be recognized as different. However, I also think it will be useful for the future scientific development of these lives to remember that, although different, they are nevertheless closely related. Thus, I think it is still useful to keep the word perezhivanie to refer to this set of closely related phenomena, but it is also important for each of these phenomena to be clearly distinguished within the perezhivanie family. It might thus be possible to continue to benefit from studying and discussing these phenomena in relation to each other, while at the same time advancing toward greater conceptual precision and less terminological confusion with regard to perezhivanie.

27 Therefore, how these environmental and personal characteristics are represented by a child can be studied by looking at her m-perezhivanie. This, I think, is the main argument of Vygotsky in the quotation offered by Veresov & Fleer (this issue): “A unit can be noted in the study of personality and environment. This unit in psychopathology and psychology has been called perezhivanie. (...) it represents the influence of the environment on the child or the individuality of the child himself; perezhivanie is the unit of the personality and the environment as it is represented in development.” (Vygotsky, cited in Veresov & Fleer, this issue). Here, I do not think that Vygotsky is proposing that the complex whole is the environmental and personal characteristics, and that perezhivanie is a unit of this complex whole; rather, I think that what he proposes is that since perezhivanie is a unit (of consciousness) where environmental and personal characteristics are represented, this is the unit (of consciousness) that should be used to study the influence of the environment on personality in development.
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Our overarching response to this collection of papers on perezhivanie is that the great range of topics across the papers makes necessary more specific conference discussions and papers: those which tackle methodological questions; applications; contextualization within various theoretical traditions, fields and professions; lacunae in the research; translation issues; and more. The papers all confirm our understanding that perezhivanie is a concept that is important to, and can create a fruitful dialogue between, the fields of cultural psychology and early childhood education. We therefore offer a composite response to those points made in several papers, which help us to think in new ways about our claim that the difference between adult and child perezhivaniya is one of degree, not of kind.

Veresov and Fleer’s argument that perezhivanie as a concept productively contributes to the study of children’s development helps us to clarify the fact that our own argument includes a different perspective: We also claim that an understanding of children’s development can be of use in the study of perezhivanie (the concept and the phenomenon). We are particularly intrigued by Roth and Jornet’s emphasis on “the kind of world that becomes possible for human beings, whose social lives are defined by ethics and freedom,” in part because this offers an understanding that social lives in early childhood are also defined by ethics and freedom. Furthermore, we too appreciate that emphasizing the phenomenon of prolepsis is essential in developing an understanding of perezhivanie; in particular an understanding of the ways that perezhivaniya take place in social relations in early childhood and then appear, later in life, to be an individual achievement.

Rey challenges our assumption that perezhivanie is a useful concept for developing the field of early childhood education, by challenging its current use in psychology. We are intrigued by his proposal regarding subjectivity and are interested in how this work could challenge and vitalize the concepts of learning and development. The notion that what is at stake is a challenge to the notion of objectivity helps us to contemplate relations between perezhivanie; recent interest in intra-active pedagogies in early childhood education, in which materials are understood to be active and performative agents (Lenz Taguchi, 2010); and our longstanding interest in the work of Martin Buber, which we have included in previous discussions of perezhivanie through the concept of co-existence (Aspelin & Persson, 2011) from relational pedagogy: “Co-existence is a goal in itself; i.e. meaning is inherent in the relationship” (2011, p. 10).

Clarà’s discussion of the difference between Vygotsky’s and Vasilyuk’s uses of the term perezhivanie as experiencing-as-struggle and the meaning that mediates experience-as-struggle makes us wonder if the study of this distinction in early childhood perezhivaniya might lead us to note significant differences between adult and early childhood perezhivaniya. We are still working to formulate relevant questions from this supposition, but the following are some attempts.

What is the difference between the death of the loved one, for an adult, and the death of a loved one when one is not yet old enough to understand death in the same terms that adults use to understand death? What is the difference between the death of a loved one for an adult and the experience of finding, for the first time, that one’s body is breakable, even when one is not knowingly taking a risk, when one is a young child. For instance, when a four year-old person who has just fallen from her bike and is bleeding on her knee, and exclaims with fury and wonder, “I just closed my eyes very quickly. I was still pedaling! I was riding!” then she is, perhaps, facing “a situation that causes her strong pain, suffering, and psychological disruption, (while she) cannot do anything, whether practical or cognitive, to resolve the existential aspects of the situation.” Is the semiotic transformation of Vygotsky’s perezhivanie distinct from this special type of activity?
We found that Blunden’s introduction was especially useful in complicating our claim that the difference between adult and child perezhivaniya is one of degree, not of kind. This paper helped us to formulate several questions about what we have called the “pivot” in perezhivaniya, the not not other who propels one through the stages: What is the role of the other person needed in perezhivaniya? For a young child could this other person be not a therapist, parent (for advice in a crisis), actor or psychoanalyst, but instead someone or even something more diffuse or more variable? Perhaps, just as the young child can actually sever the meaning of horse from a real horse using a stick, the young child can complete the full range of psychological phenomenon associated with perezhivanie within a certain relationship with his human and nonhuman environment?

These questions can be addressed in part with a response to Blunden’s claim that a child does not have a life-project. We would argue that the young child does indeed have a life-project, although it is life project of achieving a life-project (and so becoming an adult). We will devote the rest of our allotted space to an elaboration of this argument, although analysis of data that supports our claims is not yet complete and so the argument is just a rough start.

If you ask an academic to introduce herself in a professional capacity she might say: “I am interested in perezhivanie.” She will then show you this interest by telling you her thoughts about perezhivanie. It is the interest itself that is her work. If you ask an artist to introduce himself in a professional capacity he might say: “I make paintings.” He will then show you the materials and methods that he uses to make the paintings. It is the process of making that is his work. If you ask a young child to introduce herself she might say: “I have a scrape on my knee because I fell off my bike because I rode with my eyes closed, but I was still pedaling so why did I fall off?” or she might say the shorter version of this story, which is the essence of the story, i.e. who the main character (not not the young child) of the story is: “I am Lotta.” She will then show you the actual scrape, how she fell off the bike, and the expression that Lotta wears when she falls off her bike. It appears to us that it is saying “Life stand still here,” or the “making of the moment something permanent,” that is the work of the young child.

This is to be expected. While the academic is working to be a part of and co-create academia and scholarship, and learning how to do this by doing it (in a zone of proximal development); and while the artist is working to be a part of and co-create art worlds and art, and learning how to do this by doing it; the young child is working to be a part of and co-create human life and a life (her own life), and learning how to do this by doing it. What makes us human is that we are not born knowing how to do these various human activities, including the human activity of creating the aesthetic form of consciousness. What gives the young child a purpose, what she spends most of her time doing if she is lucky enough, is asking: “How do moments add up to lives?” and answering this question with “matches struck unexpectedly in the dark” (such as her telling of the story of when she/Lotta fell off her bike).

Blunden writes that adults only turn to a professional in the event of our failure to overcome a crisis, and this may be a perfect example of what Vygotsky illustrated with his theory of play: “Superficially, play bears little resemblance to the complex, mediated form of thought and volition it leads to. Only a profound internal analysis makes it possible to determine its course of change and its role in development.” (1978, p. 104) The other’s service in perezhivaniya in early childhood probably does not look anything like the advice of respected adult figures in teenage years, and perezhivaniya in early childhood may not resemble processes which allow one to avoid youth suicide or or overcome post traumatic stress disorder.

In other words, we are suggesting that we miss early childhood perezhivaniya because we are expecting it to look in early childhood as it looks in adulthood, and it does not. As we wrote in our paper, preliminary analysis of data from two studies, one that took place in a preschool and one in an elementary school, has led us to believe that all the stages that take place in adult perezhivaniya take place in early childhood perezhivaniya, in the same order, but in a different time scale. Like a humming bird whose wings move too fast to be seen in a photograph, but
whose wings can be seen when a film of the bird’s flight is played back to the observing human in slow motion, adult observation of early childhood perezhivaniya appears to require adults who live their professional lives with young children and who are responsible for raising, educating and caring for these children.

Again, preliminary analysis of this data has led us to believe that adult observation of early childhood perezhivaniya is made possible through early childhood teaching. We suspect that this is so because early child teaching occasions an immersion in a child’s life project of creating a life project, by people who are experts at, and charged with, remaining committed to the life project of this child. As well as having added artists to our research teams when we study perezhivaniya (Ferholt, 2010), we will now, also, be researching alongside early childhood teachers.

The study of early childhood perezhivaniya appears to be possible through a form of research that we have come to call early childhood educational research from within (Ferholt et al., forthcoming). Early childhood educational research from within is initiated by and for, and is guided by, teachers, and also by children: “If teachers who believe that children are capable and competent, and who therefore listen closely and respectfully to children, participate in such research, then children are indirectly a part of a research team and their voices can potentially influence early childhood education via the academy.” (Ferholt et al., forthcoming)

Life must move forward in order for the young child to make it stand still here. Culture, in the form of adult humans and their presence in the environment, which children join and begin to co-create, is literally what keeps life moving forward for young children. This pivot of early childhood perezhivaniya, at the dead center of perezhivaniya (stage five), can be described with these words: “As long as the firmament of the You is spread over me, the tempests of causality cower at my heels, and the whirl of doom congeals.” (Buber, 1970, p. 59)

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Complementary reflections on *perezhivanie*

Fernando Gonzalez Rey

The relevance of this issue devoted to *perezhivanie* is to place face to face some authors who are working with the concept, permitting reflections that are beyond the papers written by each of us. In my comment I want to point out that *perezhivanie* was not just one more concept in Vygotsky’s theory; it cannot be discussed separately from the more general representation of Vygotsky in terms of the general theory of psychology in both periods of his work in which the concept was in focus: in *The Psychology of Art* at the very beginning of his work, and in *The Problem of the Environment* and *The Crisis at Age Seven* in 1933-1934.

*perezhivanie* was, in my view, a concept in transition during those two periods in which Vygotsky focused on it. In *The Psychology of Art, perezhivanie* was used together with imagination, emotions, fantasy and artistic creation, as part of Vygotsky’s effort to advance a theoretical system able to study the complex emotional life of human beings.

However, that spontaneous enthusiasm of Vygotsky for concepts that emerge from his interest in art, and from the psychical processes related to art, was abruptly interrupted when he joined Kornilov’s group in 1924 (Zinchenko, 2012). Despite Kornilov having congratulated Vygotsky for *The Psychology of Art* in a letter sent to him while he was hospitalized in Zakharino hospital in 1925 (Zaversneva, 2016), in 1928, Kornilov criticized Vygotsky by moving away from Marxism in his lecture *The problem of will in Marxist psychology* (Vostmanova, Guseva & Ravish-Scherbo, 1994).

When he switched to more instrumental and behavioral positions between 1927 and 1931, attempting to advance on the cultural character of the higher psychological functions by the mediation of signs, the pressure of the ideological climate within Kornilov’s group might also have influenced this objectivist turn by Vygotsky, despite his new ideas in that period undoubtedly also resulting from his own thinking. This turn was not only theoretical, but also methodological, as was evidenced in his writing from 1928 in *The science of psychology*, in which he defended a naturalistic-empirical approach to research that was far from the methodological requirements for the study of *perezhivanie*. Between 1927 and 1931 he disregarded the main concepts associated with *perezhivanie* in *The Psychology of Art*.

At the end of his work in 1933-1934, Vygotsky used *perezhivanie* again within a new group of concepts, such as sense, social situation of development and a new definition of thinking. As Michael Roth and Jornet note in the summary of their joint paper in this issue: “*perezhivanie* in the light of the later Vygotsky’s direction required, as he articulated in his notebooks, rewriting much of the theory he had established before.” However, Vygotsky’s definition of *perezhivanie* was criticized by Leontiev in 1937 (1989) and was completely overlooked in psychology during the whole of the Soviet period. D. B. Elkonin referred only in passing to *perezhivanie* in his afterword to Volume IV of the *Selected Works of L. S. Vygotsky* in Russian, in which *The crisis at age seven* is included: “Here Vygotsky raised the question of the unit, which contains in itself the unity of the environment and child’s personality. The author proposes to take as this unit *perezhivanie*. Among contemporary psychologists this problem has been worked on by one of Vygotsky’s disciples, L. I. Bozhovich (1968)” (Elkonin, 1984, p.403. My translation from Russian).

This lack of attention to *perezhivanie* in Soviet psychology is an expression of the incompatibility of the theoretical and epistemological consequences that are implicitly associated with the definition of *perezhivanie*, which were deeply contradictory with respect to the dominant and official psychology represented by Leontiev and his collaborators from the 1950s. Nonetheless, Bozhovich criticized the intellectual reductionism of Vygotsky in his definition of *perezhivanie* at the end of his work. Bozhovich noted:
If the concept of perezhivanie developed by him (Vygotsky) brought us closer to the interpretation of the real causes of child development, the subsequent search for the psychological basis of perezhivanie that concluded in the concept of generalization, led us back to intellectualist positions (Bozhovich, 1968, pp. 125; my translation from Russian).

The intellectualization of perezhivanie by Vygotsky resulted from the central place he attributed to the child’s understanding of emotions in its definition, and to the relevance of generalization in the genesis of perezhivanie in The crisis at age seven. Vygotsky’s interest in the unity of the cognitive and affective processes at that moment, leads me to conclude that he still did not have the theoretical resources for consequently advancing on the new concepts he introduced in that last period of his work, on their interrelations and on their theoretical accuracy.

Perezhivanie was used in parallel with the concept of sense. Both concepts overlapped at times, which is another piece of evidence that these new concepts were still in the process of development. Without any doubt, both concepts were related to a new representation of a new general system of psychology that Vygotsky had in mind at the end of his life. According to Leontiev (1992) and Zavershneva (2016), that system was a new representation of consciousness as a system of senses. Leontiev stated:

> If Vygotsky had lived only a few more years, he would surely have concentrated his effort on the analysis of this system [of senses]. And this would inevitably have led to that of which he already dreamt in his The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology … a complete overhaul of the whole conceptual apparatus of modern psychology… No simple continuing movement, but a complicated system of senses. (Leontiev, 1992, p.43).

This hypothesis raised by Leontiev has received support from the latest studies by Zavershneva (2016) on Vygotsky’s archives.

Bozhovich understood the need to make progress on the definition of the concept of perezhivanie from the point where Vygotsky left it:

> In other words, what underlies perezhivanie, as we see it, is the world of children’s needs—their impulses, desires, intentions, complexly intertwined with one another and interrelated with possibilities for meeting these needs. And this entire complex system of connections, the entire world of a child’s needs and impulses, must be deciphered so that we can understand the nature of the influence external circumstances exert on children’s mental development. (Bozhovich, 2009, p.70. My translation from Russian).

Bozhovich, having been the only Soviet psychologist who paid attention to this concept, advanced in the right direction in her attempt to decipher the processes that, intertwining with one another, form the psychological nature of perezhivanie. This is a very contemporary challenge for those who decide to advance the study of perezhivanie. In this issue Michael Roth and Jornet have stated: “perezhivanie implies the movement of (intellectual, affective, bodily) consciousness towards consciousness.” Like Bozhovich, the authors attempt to advance the concept through a dimension not considered by Vygotsky in his definition, finding support from Bakhtin for this proposal. The topic of dialogue was quite ignored by Soviet psychologists until the 1970s. I think that it is necessary to be clear about the gaps in perezhivanie as the term was treated by Vygotsky, and to be clear also about what is new in our proposals related to perezhivanie, in order to advance new definitions of the concept or to define new paths on the basis of Vygotsky’s main concept in that final period of his work.
As a result of the theoretical vagueness of the definition of *perezhivanie* in the very late advances by Vygotsky on the concept, the epistemological and methodological demands related to its study were completely absent from the last period of his work. Vygotsky advanced important methodological reflections in *The Psychology of Art* addressing the concepts discussed by him in that book. Among his methodological statements in *The Psychology of Art*, this one deserves our attention:

> For this reason, I think it is necessary to propose another method for the psychology of art, which needs a clear methodological fundament. Against this proposal, I will frequently object to what is often said in relation to the study of the unconscious: unconscious, by the meaning of this word, is something not recognized by us and therefore not clear for us, and for this reason, it could not become the object of scientific research. Starting from this erroneous premise that “we can study only (and in general can know only) what we directly recognize has no support because we study and know many things that we do not know directly and which we know only with the support of analogies, constructions, hypotheses, conclusions, deductions and so on, in general by indirect ways”. (Vygotsky, 1965, pp. 32-33; my translation from Russian).

In my opinion, *perezhivanie* is that unit that integrates emotions, perceptions, thoughts, and that also might integrate the “full vitality of life”, as Vygotsky pointed out in *Thinking and Speech*, criticizing the divorce between intellectual operations and emotions. Or it is a concept that, according to Michael Wolf and Jornet, “denoted self-movement, a developing unity/identity that covers both the “given” and the “something-yet-to-be-determined.” Or it has other characteristics or functions as Bozhovich underlined in the following passage: “Children may therefore strive to once again relate to something they experienced previously that became appealing to them. In this case, *perezhivanie* is transformed for being of orientation to a goal in and of itself and leads to the emergence of new needs – the need for *perezhivaniya* themselves” (Bozhovich 2009, pp. 74-75). Considering all these interrelated meanings that could be related to *perezhivanie*, it is difficult to accept that *perezhivanie* can be studied only by observable emotional behaviors or children’s direct verbal expressions.

Bozhovich and her team advanced not only the theoretical definition of *perezhivanie*, but also the methodological paths for its study. Starting from some of the methodological devices proposed by Lewin and his group, particularly by Tamara Dembo, who wrote what might be the first paper about Qualitative Methodology in Psychology, Slavina (1966) conducted interesting research in studying children with intense emotional reactions against failure at school. In that work, the emotional reactions studied were defined as children’s *perezhivaniya*, whose explanation integrates different dynamic emotional states and processes of the children, such as level of aspiration, the social position of children in the school, and some other needs related to their current personality organization. The results of the research by Slavina and other researchers in Bozhovich’s team, such as Neimark and Chudnovsky, on the orientation of personality constituted strong support for Bozhovich’s theoretical definition of *perezhivanie* presented above. It would be important to repeat the work of the Bozhovich group, which is the only work that advances research on *perezhivanie* in such a congruent way.

I expect that this issue of *Mind, Culture and Activity* represents a first step in advancing new reflections and proposals that permit the continuation of discussion on Vygotsky’s foundational ideas, finding new paths for their development, capable of integrating the advances of Bozhovich and her group on this matter. Many of the foundational and later developed ideas and concepts of Vygotsky, such as *perezhivanie*, have for a long time not received the attention that they deserve.
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Perezhivanie—A Monist Concept for a Monist Theory

Alfredo Jornet & Wolff-Michael Roth

The articles in this special issue constitute a much-needed effort to establish common ground concerning the ways in which researchers and practitioners in psychology and associated fields may want to use *perezhivanie*: not simply as a transliteration for an everyday term (i.e., experience) but as a scientific concept. As Blunden (this issue) suggests, this implies not just providing a definition but also clarifying the place that the concept has as part of a larger theory of human activity and cognition. The contributions to this special issue reveal *perezhivanie* as a concept that includes oppositions with activity- and cognition-related phenomena at their poles. Thus, *perezhivanie* is to involve “a going through” and “a working over” or *catharsis* (e.g., Blunden, Ferholt & Nilsen); is a special type of *meaning* and a special type of *activity* (e.g., Clarà); refers to an actual *phenomenon* and a *theoretical concept* (e.g., Veresov & Fleer); is something social, *intersubjective*, and something individual, *subjective* (e.g., Gonzalez Rey; Roth & Jornet). But where all these may have been seen as expressions of the old Cartesian dualism between body and mind, between person and world, the contributions describe these oppositions in terms of *unity*. *Perezhivanie*, qua concept, denotes the *unity/identity* of person and environment, and thus also is a universal category of human development. It is the “cell” of human development as commodity exchange is the “cell” of bourgeois society” (Il’enkov, 1977, p. 318). *Perezhivanie* is thus a suitable concept and category within a monist theory that overcomes while retaining otherwise incommensurable contradictions. But, what is this monist theory that has *perezhivanie* as one of its concepts? What are the kinds of categories that form part of that theory? And how much overlap is there between this theory and the way Vygotsky’s theory still is presented in the mainstream uptakes?

Our own approach to these questions has evolved from focusing on those texts that Vygotsky was elaborating towards the end of his life. At that time, he was on the verge of radically revising important aspects of his earlier theory in the light of Spinoza’s monist philosophy. He was not taking Spinoza’s lessons aboard wholesale but aimed to “bring Spinozism to life in Marx[ist] psychol[ogy]” (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 93). Vygotsky never had the time to finish this task, but his legacy is of tremendous heuristic value as it allows us to integrate it with other non-dualist works that are consistent with Vygotsky’s dialectical materialist premises.

Central to the Spinozist approach is the idea that mind and body (extension) are not two substances of different kind; instead, there is only one substance that has different attributes (i.e., manifests itself in different, even contradictory ways). This view of Spinoza, which sometimes is accused of constituting a (modal) parallelism rather than a unity (cf. Shein, 2013), was for Vygotsky (1999) “the antithesis to parallelism and, consequently to the dualism of Descartes” (p. 122). He invites us instead to consider thought and extension (body) not as “a parallelistic correlation of previously severed attributes,” but as aspects of “a function[al]-dynamic and concrete context” (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 94). Vygotsky directs us toward a *concrete human psychology* in which categories (e.g., *perezhivanie*) neither are the result of nor denote abstractions. Rather, they precisely correspond to those real functional-dynamic and concrete contextual wholes from which those aspects such as thinking (mind) and doing (body) unfold. From this perspective, a scientific category not only is identical with the phenomenon but also is consistent with the method: a concrete method of development in which otherwise distinct attributes—e.g., the biological and the cultural, the individual and the social, thinking and speaking—reveal themselves in contradictory but inseparable lines of development. As a result, analytical units are concrete, dynamic, and living wholes that include *change* and *time*—“both growth and movement” (Il’enkov, 1977, p. 318)—as internal aspects.

Not everything that today is taken to be Vygotsky’s theory in the mainstream literature is consistent with a monist view. Vygotsky himself was aware that some of his analyses had been “carried out in 2 planes: the external field and the semantic field” (Vygotsky in Zavershneva,
2016, p. 117), which constituted “no unity, but parallelism” (p. 117). To overcome this, Vygotsky was striving towards a unified plan to investigate the relation between thinking and action as an internal one. In this new approach, “to the extent [the dynamics] is in the action, the action involves thinking” (p. 117). Here, thinking and action are not different things that interact. There is not activity, on the one hand, and meaning, on the other hand. There are not two things external to each other that require being connected by external “mediators.” Instead, thinking and action are two aspects of the same living unit. Notions such as internalization, when they suppose a movement from the external to the internal, therefore cannot work as valid analytical concepts because all that matters to change already is internal to the unit. Similarly, in perezhivanie, personal characteristics and environmental characteristics are but two attributes of a single reality: the concrete event, the real social drama that includes thinking, doing, and emoting in necessary unity/identity and not just as the fortuitous outcome of external analyses.

Several contributions relate perezhivanie to another concept that Vygotsky was developing at about the same time: the social situation of development. The connection is not just incidental. In the text where he elaborates it, Vygotsky complains that a major impediment in the study of child development consists in

> The incorrect solution to the problem of the environment and its role in the dynamics of age when the environment is considered as something outside with respect to the child, as a circumstance of development, as an aggregate of objective conditions existing without reference to the child and affecting him by the very fact of their existence. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 198)

From a Spinozist perspective, the external form of affection that Vygotsky critiques makes no sense because two substances external to each other have nothing in common and cannot affect each other. But if we conceive of child and environment as two manifestations of the same substance, then they already and inherently are related and do not need to be brought together by means of an analysis external to the phenomenon. The relation is not one of cause and effect; there is only self-movement, the concrete unfolding of social, dramatic events. As a consequence, any theoretical discussion has to be of a practical order. Whatever we may identify as forming part of the social and intersubjective and, alternatively, as forming part of the individual and the subjective, is in fact part of the same living developing whole. From a Spinozist perspective, to think of perezhivanie as independent from its social situation is non-sense, “for to explain the event we call ‘thinking’, to disclose its effective cause, it is necessary to include it in the chain of events within which it arises of necessity and not fortuitously” (Il’enkov, 1977, p. 37).

In Vygotsky’s writings perezhivanie and the social situation of development constantly change together, eventually leading to revolutionary leaps in their relation. He affirms that

> the infant is ... a changing being ... his life from day to day resembles not so much a turning in a circle and reproducing one and the same situation as it does a movement up along a spiral related to a qualitative change in the situation of development itself. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 232)

Vygotsky condemns those theories in which the child “is presented as a purely biological being who knows nothing except himself, is wholly submerged in the world of his own internal [perezhivanie] and is not capable of any kind of contact with this environment” (p. 235). In his view, there is not first an individual that is immersed in her own subjectivity who latter is socialized or the outcome of a social co-construction. Instead there is a being that is both individual and social from the beginning, “the mentality of the infant from the first moment of his life is locked into common life with other people” (p. 235). Our contribution exhibits this intermeshing of the social and the individual in a transcription where two turns involving a teacher and a
student (Sylvia) are illustrated as a unit in which there is not just speaking but also responding, the unity of active reception (from the environment) and replying (acting on the environment). We thereby illustrate the concrete unity of person and environment that characterizes that particular relation at that particular moment in the participants’ developmental trajectories. We show how a given mathematical practice is not first external to the participants. Instead, it is a self-moving force where everything is internal. Because there is an intersubjective speech field—where words and actions are a reality for (at least) two—everything in the person’s perezhivanie has both personal and environmental characteristics.

The contributions to this special issue—though produced to establish common ground—cannot be taken as the end-point of the inquiry into perezhivanie. This is so not only because analytical units ought to be always open to contestation and development, but also because the whole point is to make scientific practice possible. Defining perezhivanie thus cannot become the end result. To be a useful analytic unit, perezhivanie needs to allow for change and surprise. As a category in a monist theory, perezhivanie leads to an inquiry into our diverse possibilities for being and growing rather than to how different persons perezhivat a given situation differently. In a monist theory, the category of perezhivanie requires us to specify those inter-functional connections that change in their organization as distinct person–environment units unfold, and to re-specify in terms of social and developmental categories what traditionally have been conceived as mental and purely subjective phenomena, including the emotions. We may find it useful to apply to perezhivanie what pragmatist philosophers have said about the Anglo-Saxon concept “experience”: it “should be dropped entirely from discussion unless held strictly to a single definite use: that namely, of calling attention to the fact that Existence has organism and environment as its aspects” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/2008, p. 193). We may then work towards a non-dualist science in which being—as in “the unity of being and nonbeing” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 243)—is the primary phenomenon. Being then can be seen as a mode of life (and not just of “subjective” life) where “the criterion of the unity of intellect and affect is the principal fundamental relation to the situation—in the sense of connectedness and freedom” (Vygotsky, in Zavershneva, 2016, p. 117). The present special issue is an important step in that direction.

REFERENCES


The journey forward

Nikolai Veresov, Marilyn Fleer

What makes cultural-historical theory unique is that every concept refers to a certain aspect of the complex process of development that we believe are collectively exemplified in this volume of MCA dedicated to the concept of perezhivanie. The role, place, and interrelationships of all concepts within a theory become clear when the origins and development of higher mental functions are considered. Cultural-historical theory provides a system of interconnected instruments for the theoretical analysis of the process of development in its wholeness and complexity. The theoretical content of each concept can be understood through identifying (1) which aspect of sociocultural genesis of human mind this concept is related to, and (2) how this concept is related to other concepts and principles of the theory. Our paper in this volume unpacks these two directions through a theoretical analysis of perezhivanie. Having this in mind we suggested two important distinctions coming from Vygotsky’s original texts. The first distinction is about two levels of analysis – (1) phenomenological level (perezhivanie as a psychological phenomenon), and (2) conceptual level (perezhivanie as a theoretical concept). We believe this distinction is important as it differentiates different meanings of perezhivanie in Vygotsky’s original texts – phenomenological meaning and theoretical/conceptual meaning. The meaning of both is different. That is, a phenomenon is not a concept and the concept is not a phenomenon – even though both are equally important for understanding what is meant by perezhivanie in scientific work (Fleer, 2016, in press).

When we tested this conceptualization of the concept of perezhivanie in relation to the papers presented in this special issue of MCA, we noticed that perezhivanie has been used as a phenomenon (see Blunden, Clàr, Ferholt and Nilssen) and as a theoretical concept (see Gonzalez Rey, Roth and Jornet and Veresov and Fleer). Indeed, the papers in this volume begin by using perezhivanie as a phenomenon and the latter papers have drawn upon perezhivanie as a theoretical concept. Blunden has nicely captured these two aspects of perezhivanie through the thoughtful placement of the papers in this volume, and together the papers give a rich conceptualization of the term perezhivanie.

Our second theoretical point focuses on the principle of refraction, which we also believe challenges the principle of reflection. This is in line with Gonzalez Rey (this volume), who has raised this point in his paper. If a prism is a metaphor it definitely challenges a mirror as a metaphor of the principle of reflection; mirror reflects, prism refracts. The light goes through the prism, the child emotionally and intellectually lives through the social situation. This in turn shows the complex nature of perezhivanie which should not be reduced to emotional reactions only. Gonzalez Rey (this volume) discusses the principle of refraction nicely when he draws attention to the psychological formation of personality. When quoting Vygotsky (1994), “it is not any factors in themselves...[which determines future course of development], but the same factor refracted through the prism of the child’s perezhivanie” (p. 340), he argues that this “definition permits us to overcome the concepts of reflection, internalization and social determinism”.

In our paper we introduced the dramatic nature of perezhivanie, as a form of refraction of dramatic collisions in everyday and specially created situations. We think that this is important since perezhivanie is a prism which reflects the social environment, but dramatic collisions are turning points as they redirect the child’s developmental trajectory being refracted through child’s perezhivanie. This is in line with Vygotsky’s theoretical position that higher mental functions “can be most fully developed in the form of drama” (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p.59; Original emphasis). This shows the relations of the concept of perezhivanie with other concepts in cultural-historical theory (social situation of development, drama and the general genetic law of cultural development).
Perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1), and perezhivanie a theoretical concept (P2) conceptualized within a system of concepts, is a summary of how we see the theoretical contribution of our paper. However, we completely realize that we are at the beginning of a long process of discovering the role and the place of this concept in cultural-historical theory. The current state of affairs could be expressed by the words of Smororinsky (2011) “perezhivanie thus far remains more a tantalizing notion than a concept with clear meaning” (p. 339). This special issue of MCA reflects clearly this state of affairs and at the same time serves as a facilitator for further theoretical and empirical research. We note key points from an array of possible ideas each of which would generate new thinking, such as:

- “…the relation between environment and and person cannot be of the cause-effect type. Instead, perezhivanie implies the movement of (intellectual, affective, bodily) consciousness towards consciousness” (Roth and Jornet, this volume);
- “The human subjective processes are never moved by one final cause and do not represent stable content; they flow in time, integrate, and unfold into different forms during the same perezhivanie” (Gonzelez Rey, this volume);
- “there are not many professions that concern themselves with creating the aesthetic form of consciousness” (Ferholt and Nilsson, this volume);
- “experiencing-as-struggle” (Clarà; this volume).

Perezhivanie is one of the key concepts of cultural-historical theory. Both directions of research (phenomenological and conceptual) are needed. The papers in this volume capture the significance of both P1 and P2 and as such, this represents a landmark in the study of the phenomenon and theoretical concept of perezhivanie. As Blunden (this volume) argues “Perezhivanie is a complex concept and there is no translation of the word into English which captures even the core content of the concept”. Each of the authors have picked up on the need for more clarity, and this volume, we argue do this robustly, because they address both P1 and P2 and therefore begins to articulate the essence or core of the content of this important concept.

Summarizing our reflections, the challenge for researchers interested in using perezhivanie as a concept and as a phenomenon in their work relates to the destiny of scientific concepts. The destiny of a zone of proximal development is an example of years of collective efforts in order to improve the understanding of ZPD from simplified and fragmented versions dominated in 1970-1990s to deeper and better understanding in the beginning of 21st Century (Chaiklin, 2003; Veresov, 2010). It seems that in relation to perezhivanie we have the same case. Understanding of perezhivanie at both levels (phenomenological and theoretical) is still a challenge. The papers in this volume give direction for researchers interested in the cultural and historical conception of practices that have come to inform our scientific work. In the example of ZPD, it is argued that in order to understand the theoretical content of the concept of ZPD we “need to understand what Vygotsky meant by ‘development’ in general” (Chaiklin, 2003). This advice by Chaiklin can also be applied to the concept of perezhivanie. This means that we need to understand how this concept is related and theoretically reflects the complex and dialectical process of sociocultural genesis of human mind, and how this concept is related and interconnected with other main concepts and principles of cultural-historical theory. Looking at perezhivanie through the lenses of child development as a sociocultural genesis of human higher mental functions, identifying its role in the process of development, gives direction without risking loss of content. We completely understand that that there are still more questions than answers. However, this special issue of Mind, Culture and Activity makes an important step forward. As Laozi said “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”; the first step was done by Vygotsky, and this volume of MCA, paves the way for the steps that follow on this important theoretical and empirical journey.
REFERENCES


Conclusion