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## Lev Vygotsky: *Philologist and Defectologist, A Sociointellectual Biography*<sup>1</sup>

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Among the pioneers of psychology, Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) may be the best known of those who are least understood. This is not just a problem of historical scholarship: The misunderstanding of Vygotsky started with his



own students and collaborators—during his lifetime—and continued after his death. It is, in other words, integrated into the literature. And that literature, as a result, appears fractured and inconsistent. Indeed, the largest and the best intellectual biography of Vygotsky is titled *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Yet even this excellent book is far from providing a full and complete story. The discovery of the real Vygotsky is still to come.

Figure 7.1 Lev Vygotsky, 1925.

There are many reasons for systematic misunderstanding—even misrepresentation. Among them we can include Vygotsky's changes in theoretical outlook; his premature death at the age of 37, when he was in the middle of the most prolific period of his career; the lack of public access to manuscripts and documents in the Vygotsky archives; problems of posthumous editing; and the censorship of his works published in the Soviet Union, the effects of which were in turn multiplied

by mistakes that accumulated in Western translations (Yasnitsky, 2010; van der Veer & Yasnitsky, in press). These confusions, and many others, have resulted in an image of Vygotsky that can be described charitably as having been constructed by his students, followers, and admirers.

The beginning of the cult of Vygotsky dates back to 1978. This was the start of the present Vygotsky boom (Cole, 2004; Garai & Kocski, 1995). Two inaugural events took place in this year: First, the book *Mind in Society* came out under Vygotsky's name (Vygotsky, 1978); and second, the well-known British and American philosopher Stephen Toulmin published his programmatic book review titled *The Mozart of Psychology* (Toulmin, 1978). There, Toulmin compared Lev Vygotsky to Wolfgang Mozart and his right-hand man and coworker, Alexander Romanovich Luria (1902–1977), to Ludwig van Beethoven. Whereas the second part of this comparison has since been largely forgotten, the association of Mozart with Vygotsky as the quintessential creative genius of psychology has survived and prospered.

After the publication of *Mind in Society*, the celebrated notion of the “zone of proximal development” became synonymous with Vygotsky's name. Interestingly enough, however, Vygotsky never actually wrote this book: It is a compilation and juxtaposition of fragments taken from different works written during different periods of his career. This is made clear in the preface: The editors—Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (1978)—confess that they “constructed” some chapters, whereas others are summarized or “based on” Vygotsky's actual writings: “We realize that in tampering with the original we may have distorted history; however, we hope that by stating our procedures and by adhering as closely as possible to the principles and content of the work, we have not distorted Vygotsky's meaning” (Cole et al., 1978, p. x).

The multitude and, even more importantly, the diversity of contemporary interpretations of Vygotsky's theory lead some authors to discuss the “multiple readings” (van der Veer, 2008) or even “versions of Vygotsky” (Gillen, 2000). Some even question, pessimistically, if anybody ever actually reads Vygotsky's own words these days (Gredler & Schields, 2004). This chapter is therefore an attempt to do just that: to return to the source and to trace the genesis and development of Vygotsky's works, while providing the means to contextualize new readings.

The novelty of the story presented here is due, in part, to recent research in Vygotsky's personal archives (Zavershneva, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). It also considers the international and interdisciplinary nature of Vygotsky's project. However, our story is also distinct in yet another sense. One of the main achievements of the last decade is the realization that the gigantic and ambitious project of Vygotskian psychology cannot be understood if treated as the “single-handed” effort of a “solitary genius.” Instead, when one looks behind the constructed facade, there is a noticeable shift from *Vygotsky as such* to *Vygotsky as corporate author*: the leading representative, like Jean Piaget or Kurt Lewin, of a dense personal network of scholars who shared the same research agenda, similar views on methods, and a common understanding of the development of scientific theory.

The scholars of this “Vygotsky Circle” worked in parallel in several cities of the Soviet Union in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia—chiefly in Moscow, Kharkov, and Leningrad—and traveled frequently to take part in “internal

conferences” to coordinate their research. This network was instrumental in the development and dissemination of Vygotskian thought during his lifetime, although especially after his death, both in the Soviet Union and internationally. This huge network centers on Lev Vygotsky but includes several dozen associates and collaborators. Virtually all these individuals were instrumental in the development of his scientific thought, the progress of his career, and the later dissemination, and—for good or bad—the global popularization of Vygotskian ideas after his death (Yasnitsky, in press).

## THE CONTOURS OF THE PORTRAIT: THE TWO PASSIONS OF VYGOTSKY

Only two lines are really needed to draw a contour of the portrait of Vygotsky the scholar. These lines span Vygotsky's entire life and career and can be detected in virtually anything he wrote, said, and did. Both lines begin in his early life as a provincial Jewish boy living with his family in the town of Gomel, in Belarus, where Vygotsky spent more than half his short life. The first, *philological*,<sup>6</sup> line is formed by Vygotsky's affection for “the Word,” an affection he developed through his childhood reading and early studies in the humanities. Set within the broad Zeitgeist of German Romanticism—specifically, the works of the great German scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) and his Russian-Ukrainian follower Alexander Potebnya (1835–1891)—Vygotsky considered the Word (i.e., human speech and language) as the highest manifestation of a dialectic unity of human culture and its products. He also considered it an instrument for shaping human thought and spirit. This understanding of human culture is clearly in line with Vygotsky's Romanticist predecessors. In his last book, *Thinking and Speech* (1934), Vygotsky unambiguously refers to and continues Potebnya's earlier work, *Thought and Language* (1892), as well as his later works on the cultural influence of art and poetry, myth, cultural symbols, verbal understanding, and language. Despite the critical attitude that he often expressed toward the legacy of arguably the greatest Russian Humboldtian—for instance, in his *Psychology of Art* (1926/1971)—Vygotsky seems to be in total agreement with Potebnya's most essential views about the nature of language.

In 1913–1917, Vygotsky's pursued full-time studies at Moscow State University in the Law Department and was simultaneously auditing courses in the Historical-Philosophical Department at Shaniavsky Open University. Little is known about the law degree that Vygotsky obtained from Moscow State University in 1917. In contrast, Vygotsky's philological treatise on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which he completed in 1916 at the age of 20, received international acclaim. Vygotsky's admiration for the beauty of the Word—including the problems of understanding art and masterpieces of world literature, the complexities of language in its historical development, the intricacies of speech production and their interplay

<sup>6</sup> Here, by philology we understand, following Russian scholarly tradition and according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the study of literature and of disciplines relevant to literature or to language as used in literature.

with thinking, emotions, personality, and culture—remained at the center of his interests throughout his life.

The second line tracing the contour of Vygotsky's portrait is *defectological* and it is formed by Vygotsky's concern with freedom and liberation. Social injustice became obvious fairly early in Vygotsky's life, when, in 1913, the quota system for accepting Jews to Russian universities was changed from achievement based to mere vote casting. Exceptionally well prepared for entrance exams, Vygotsky was obviously frustrated to learn about this policy change, but, to his great surprise, he won the ballot and was accepted at Moscow University. It is difficult—perhaps impossible—to trace the source of Vygotsky's sentiment for freedom, and his ideas on human liberation are scattered throughout the entire corpus of his preserved written works: from his early literary reviews and essays on art and the “Jewish question” to his later works on the interrelations between affect and intellect, human will and freedom of choice, and language and consciousness. The perceived imperfection of the world motivated Vygotsky's activism toward changing this imperfect world. This “progressivist” stance was quite in line with the prosocialist sentiments of the Russian intelligentsia after the October 1917 Revolution and the call for creating a “New Man,” capable of overthrowing the social constraints of the capitalist “Old World” of violence, inequity, and oppression, equally capable of overcoming the limits of his own biological nature. At the end of his doctoral dissertation, *Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1926/1971), Vygotsky enthusiastically quoted Leon Trotsky (1924/2005), specifically his views on “reshaping of man” in his *Literature and Revolution*. For political reasons the following quote from Trotsky was later removed by the editor of the Soviet edition of the mid-1960s and was first restored only in the most recent Russian edition of the book (Vygotskii, 1926/2008):

[Man] will try to master first the semiconscious and then the subconscious processes in his own organism, such as breathing, the circulation of the blood, digestion, reproduction, and, within necessary limits, he will try to subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiologic life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psycho-physical training. This is entirely in accord with evolution. ... Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman. (Trotsky, 1924/2005, pp. 206–207)

Yet then, quite characteristically (as if to undermine his fascination with Marxism and underline the diversity of various philosophical influences on his thought), Vygotsky complemented this Marxist quote with another one that actually concludes his dissertation work. The concluding quote comes from a philosophical idol of Vygotsky's youth, Baruch Spinoza: “That of which the body is capable has not yet been determined” (Vygotskii, 1926/2008, p. 283).

It is clear that Vygotsky was no traditional ivory-tower academic but was a profound thinker driven to participate in an ever-changing world and to contribute to the improvement of man and society, and overcoming various defects of human social, cultural, and biological development. This applied, pragmatic orientation of Vygotsky's theorizing is highly reminiscent of the famous saying that “there is nothing more practical than a good theory,” the motto of yet another luminary of psychological theory and practice, Kurt Lewin. The similarity between the views of the two is no mere coincidence and was based on personal acquaintance, familiarity with each other's works, and intensive intellectual exchange (either direct or mediated by their numerous collaborators and associates such as Alexander Luria, Sergei Eisenstein, Tamara Dembo, Gita Birenbaum, Bluma Zeigarnik, and Nina Kaulina) and, reportedly, heated discussions during several meetings that they had (Yasnitsky, in press).

In sum, these two lines—philology as “passion for word (*logos*)” and striving for freedom—evolved and transformed into Vygotsky's interest in the problems of children's “defects” (i.e., physical disability, retardation, and regression) and into his psychological research on the genesis and evolution of distinctly human *higher mental functions* in their cultural development. Indeed, the connection between these two seemingly unrelated research programs cannot be adequately understood except as driven by Vygotsky's efforts to find a theory of human development that would inform pedagogical and rehabilitation practice and overcome developmental defects in impaired and abnormal children, consequently improving human nature. Vygotsky's two passions materialized around 1917 upon his return from Moscow to Gomel, specifically through his subsequent work at the educational and research establishments in this provincial Belarus town.

During the early period of the new economic policy (NEP) of the Bolshevik state, which allowed for the reintroduction of small private businesses into the national economy in 1921, Vygotsky enthusiastically worked in Gomel with homeless children—the legacy of the years of revolution and civil war—and in education of children with normal and retarded development. He also lectured in a range of humanities and social sciences at a number of local educational establishments and professional organizations. Vygotsky even cofounded a publishing house and, appointed by the new Soviet government as a theatrical entrepreneur of the Gomel region, had to travel frequently across the country in search of new engagements. In 1923 Vygotsky also founded a psychological laboratory under the auspices of the local Pedagogical College: There he collected experimental data and completed and wrote what became his book, *Educational Psychology* (1926). Most of his dissertation on the *Psychology of Art* (1926/1971) was also completed in Gomel and summarized half a decade of experimental studies and theoretical generalizations.

Vygotsky's Gomel period (1917–1924) was instrumental in his later career as an experimental and developmental psychologist. The Gomel postrevolutionary years were significant and formative for Vygotsky on an existential and personal level, too. It was here that tuberculosis took the life of Vygotsky's younger brother—the same disease would later kill Vygotsky himself—and, within a year, his other brother died of typhus. During this period Vygotsky passed through a temporary crisis that was possibly caused by these untimely deaths and the aggravation of

his own tuberculosis. For some reason, in the early 1920s—perhaps as an act of Marxist transformation of himself into a “New Soviet Man”—the young scholar slightly changed his distinctly Jewish name Lev Simkhovich Vygotsky (with “d” in the middle) into a somewhat Russified Lev Semenovich Vygotsky under which name we know him now (Mescheryakov, 2007). Finally, it was also in Gomel that Vygotsky met a young woman, Roza Noevna Smekhova, who later became his wife and the mother of his two daughters, Gita (born in Gomel in 1925) and Asya (born in Moscow in 1930).

### THE EARLY MOSCOW YEARS (1924–1929) AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW PSYCHOLOGY

Vygotsky left Gomel for Moscow in early 1924. As for many provincial scholars and artists who left the outskirts of the country for urban centres like Moscow, Leningrad or Kharkov in the early 1920s, the move to Moscow marked the beginning of an entirely new period for Vygotsky’s research, and it opened up new and unprecedented career opportunities for him. His personal network of informal contacts and connections included both his older Gomel and his newer Moscow acquaintances who were instrumental in getting him established as a professional. For example, he was hired as a psychologist through the recommendation of Kazan-born new Muscovite Alexander Luria and became an educational administrator and defectologist by invitation of his former Gomel colleague Izrail’ Danyushevskii. From 1924 onward, Vygotsky was affiliated with the Institute of Psychology as junior researcher and the Ministry of Education (*Narkompros*) as the head of the Section of the Upbringing of Physically and Mentally Handicapped Children; he also taught psychology at a number of different educational establishments in Moscow. The move to Moscow also laid the foundation of a lifelong alliance, collaboration, and friendship between Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria.

Due to his extensive scientific, educational, and administrative activism, Vygotsky became one of the recognized leaders of Soviet defectology within just a year or so after his arrival and was even sent on a *Narkompros* funded trip to Europe to represent the Soviet Union at a conference on the education of the deaf and blind in London in summer 1925 (van der Veer & Zavershneva, in press). This turned out to be his only trip abroad. Upon his return from the trip, in fall 1925, Vygotsky was hospitalized after an outbreak of tuberculosis and stayed in the hospital for almost half a year until late spring 1926. Due to his severe illness, Vygotsky could not even attend the public defense of his own dissertation on the *Psychology of Art*, and the degree of doctor of sciences was awarded to him in absentia in October–November 1925. Undoubtedly, otherwise great news for Vygotsky, the degree was not much consolation to him at that time: In winter 1925–1926, in an overcrowded and noisy hospital room that accommodated five other terminally ill patients, Vygotsky was literally struggling for life. Miraculously, Vygotsky survived and was released from the hospital in May 1926. The disease took its toll: Unable to move independently and with a lingering disability as evidenced by his medical and employment records, for medical reasons Vygotsky was qualified as legally

incapacitated, as an invalid, and remained out of work for the entire year of 1926. Yet the year turned out to be a very productive one.

### *Crisis in Psychology*

In 1926, Vygotsky reflected on his earlier engagement with the variety of psychological systems and theoretical frameworks proposed by his contemporaries (e.g., Pavlov and Bekhterev’s notion of reflex, Kornilov’s concept of reaction, Alfred Adler’s ideas on overcompensation). He came to the conclusion that a radically new, distinctly innovative, and revolutionary way of psychological theorizing was needed. According to Luria, Vygotsky accomplished historical and theoretical work, enormous in its scope, reading basically all of Russian and Western psychologies of the time, and reflecting on the methodological foundations of psychology as a discipline: “Our aim, overambitious in the manner characteristic of the times, was to create a new, comprehensive approach to human psychological process” (Luria, 1979, p. 40). Indeed, very much in the spirit of the “prophet armed” Leon Trotsky’s announcement of the new man of communism, Vygotsky prophesied the advent of the new psychology of the future:

Such a system has not yet been created. We can say with confidence that it will not arise out of the ruins of empirical psychology or in the laboratories of reflexologists. It will come as a broad biosocial synthesis of the theory of animal behavior and societal man. This new psychology will be a branch of general biology and at the same time the basis of all sociological sciences. It will be the knot that ties the science of nature and the science of man together. It will therefore, indeed, be most intimately connected with philosophy, but with a strictly scientific philosophy which represents the combined theory of scientific knowledge and not with the speculative philosophy that preceded scientific generalizations. (Vygotsky, 1925/1997, p. 61).

Vygotsky framed his theoretical and methodological work in terms of a “crisis” in psychology, a theme that seems to have been there since the very beginning of the discipline (see, e.g., the treatises on “psychological crisis” by Karl Bühler, Hans Driesch, Kurt Koffka, William Stern, Nikolai Kostyleff, Mary Whiton Calkins, N. N. Lange, S. L. Frank, Edmund Husserl, Kurt Lewin). Vygotsky’s contribution to this discussion of the methodological crisis in psychology was a now famous theoretical and methodological study, “The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology” (written in 1926–1927). Judging from the manuscript of the treatise on the *Crisis* and, especially, the marginal handwritten notes and anonymous reviewer’s comments on it, Vygotsky apparently realized numerous flaws and methodological problems with his argument, and it appears that he did not intend to publish it as such. Instead, a series of journal articles came out in the second half of the 1920s (e.g., Vygotskii, 1928), in which Vygotsky exposed his views on the historical crisis in psychology and succinctly formulated his methodological credo (Zavershneva, 2009).

In these works Vygotsky discussed the crisis in psychology in terms of a perceived need in general psychological theory. The whole multitude of contemporary psychological theories, argued Vygotsky, could be reduced to two principal

worldviews and theoretical positions. Vygotsky refers to these two worldviews as two psychologies that reflect the split between the world of the physical and that of the mental. To prevent such a split, Vygotsky suggested three requirements for the unified psychological science of the future that, as a matter of fact, have not lost their importance for contemporary theoretical and empirical antireductionistic psychology (Clegg, 2009): (1) a unified *theoretical basis*; (2) a sound *methodology* of empirical research; and (3) a strong *connection between theory and practice* in contemporary psychological theories and practices of industrial, child, and clinical psychology. Vygotsky argued that, rather than reducing theoretical psychology to either the physical and physiological or the mental and cognitive, a third, radically different way was needed. Thus, one of the most principal topics of Vygotsky's theorizing became the interrelation between mind and body, the physiological and the psychological, which he referred to as the "psychophysical problem" throughout his writings over the last and the most productive decade of his life. A nonreductionist solution to this problem needed to be found somewhere—but where? The answer is as simple as it is confusing and vague: in human culture.

### Cultural Mediation

Like many thinkers before him, for instance, Pierre Janet, James Mark Baldwin, George Herbert Mead, Karl Marx, and his associate Friedrich Engels, Vygotsky cherished the idea of the social and cultural origin of human mind and consciousness, also referred to as "sociogenesis" (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000). Furthermore, the idea of centrality of labor, tools, and instruments in human culture and practice of humankind is not unique to Vygotsky's thought and can be found elsewhere in the writings of his predecessors, perhaps most notably in the works of Marx and Engels. Yet Vygotsky's scientific contribution is highly original. He was the first to come up with the idea of the leading role of signs as *psychological* tools in human *psychological* development and, even more importantly, to productively apply it in *experimental psychological studies*. This innovative intellectual synthesis is currently widely known as Vygotsky's pioneering idea of *cultural mediation of psychological processes*. Thus, by the beginning of 1927 Vygotsky understood human development as intrinsically cultural—mediated by human artefacts created through people's social practice and used as psychological self-directed tools to overcome the constraints of humanity's biological nature, thus creating a uniquely biocultural entity, pretty much in the spirit of Trotsky's utopian call for the creation of a "higher social biologic type." For Vygotsky, cultural artefacts included a wide range of "psychological instruments," from the alphabet, the Braille system, mnemonics, charts, visual learning aids, and systems of counting to language, literature, and art. All are cultural mediators that preexist any individual human mind and shape its development through the individuals' conscious and active participation in cultural practices, and all, on the other hand, are shaped and continuously altered by cultural innovations of humankind. Vygotsky's private notes from 1926–1927 show that these ideas were developed by the beginning of 1927 but were first formulated and published only a year later, after a series of experimental studies on cultural mediation were completed (Zavershneva, 2010a).

The phenomenon of cultural mediation was empirically studied by Vygotsky and his associates, who modified a wide range of classical research methods borrowed from a great many Western studies, including those of Wolfgang Köhler, Jean Piaget, and Narziss Ach. Vygotsky and his team believed that the only way to investigate distinctly human psychological phenomena is through their development—that is, as a process rather than a result—and conducted research on *higher mental functions* in their development in ontogenesis. The studies of Vygotsky, Luria, and their collaborators of 1920–1930s, based on the postulate that "behavior can only be understood as the history of behavior" (Blonsky, quoted by Vygotsky, 1929/1994, p. 70) were described as *historical-genetic research* in Vygotsky's terminology of the late 1920s. Interestingly, a recently published book presented this as a new approach under the name of *microdevelopmental research* (Granott & Parziale, 2002).

### Instrumental Psychology: Experimental Research on Microdevelopment

The first cultural-historical publications specifically discussed the original micro-genetic method of *double stimulation*, designed to investigate the development of cultural forms in a child's behavior (see, e.g., Luria, 1928/1994; Vygotsky, 1929/1994). The method places emphasis on the creation and the strategies of the use of *mediators*, *psychological tools*, or *instruments*, which is why the author of arguably the first presentation of these studies ever published in English referred to it as "the method of instrumentally psychological research" (Luria, 1928/1994, p. 48). In these experimental studies of cultural development, a child was placed in problem-solving situations and assigned a task so difficult that it could not be solved without the application of some special technical means, either invented by the child herself or ready-made and suggested to the child by adult researchers. Thus, in many experimental studies on cultural mediation using the *method of double stimulation* two sets of stimuli were given to the participants: The first set of stimuli was used as an object of a specific goal-driven action, and the second, auxiliary set of stimuli was used as an instrument, or cultural tool, to achieve the goal and to facilitate certain psychological functions, such as perception, attention, or, more typically, memory. The results of this series of experimental studies were not published until 1928–1929 at the earliest, quite often under the names of Vygotsky's collaborators (Sakharov, Zankov, Leontiev).

Perhaps the most illustrative of these—at least one of the most well known worldwide—is the study of concept formation by Vygotsky's collaborator, Leonid Sakharov (1900–1928). In Sakharov's study of concept formation, participants aimed to understand artificial concepts denoting certain, unknown to the participants, combinations of the characteristics of three-dimensional geometrical figures of varying size, shape, and color—the figures themselves being the first set of stimuli—with the help of the second set of stimuli (i.e., the artificially created words denoting these concepts that were written on the bottom of the figures; Sakharov, 1930/1994). In the same spirit, Vygotsky's and Luria's students worked on a study using pictograms in which the participants were required to draw

pictures—that is, to create the auxiliary means—that would help them memorize specific given words. This study, reportedly conducted by a large group of young student researchers, continued throughout the entire academic year of 1929, and, although it did not result in any formal academic publication, it seems to have been a very educational experience for both the supervisors of this research project (Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev) and the young scholars involved (A. V. Zaporozhets, L. I. Bozhovich, L. I. Slavina, N. G. Morozova, and R. E. Levina) alike. In another series of studies by Vygotsky's collaborators, Zankov and Leontiev, two sets of pictures were assigned to normal and mentally retarded participants, and the first set was to be remembered with the help of the other set. For instance, Leontiev's famous cross sectional study was done with three age groups: (1) preschoolers and elementary schoolchildren, (2) middle schoolchildren, and (3) adults. In the first series of experiments the participants were asked to remember as many as possible of the 15 pictures that were given to them. In the second series, the same task was accompanied with an instruction to use an additional set of similar—but not identical—pictures that might help the subjects to remember those in the first set. The results of this study are often presented as a figure with two curves indicating recall rate in the three age groups in the situations of “direct” and “mediated” remembering. Quite predictably, both curves on the chart show considerable growth of recall rate with age. However, interestingly enough, while younger children and adults remembered the items virtually equally well (rather, equally bad, in case of the younger children) in both experimental conditions of mediated and non-mediated remembering, the middle school children demonstrated a tremendous difference in their remembering abilities in the situation of facilitated and aided (i.e., mediated) remembering approaching that of the adult subjects. The figure formed by the two curves on the chart—starting and ending virtually in the same points and diverging in the middle—is somewhat reminiscent of a parallelogram and famously described by Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev as the parallelogram of development (Figure 7.2).

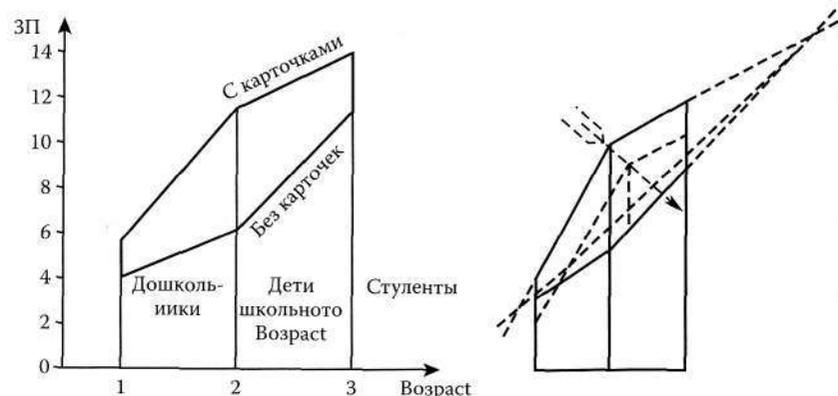


Figure 7.2 Parallelogram of development. (From A. N. Leontiev, Moscow, Uchpedgiz, 1931. With permission.)

The parallelogram of development was used to illustrate the instrumental role of “psychological tools” in the development of “lower-level” human memory in early childhood into “higher mental function” of logical and culturally mediated remembering of the adults (Leontiev, 1931). Another important outcome of this research was a clear, fairly visual illustration of the notion of *internalization*, also variously referred to as *ingrowing* (in Russian, *vraschivanie*, Vygotsky) and *appropriation* (Leontiev): psychological tools that initially constitute an interrelation between a physical object, meaningful situation, and a goal-directed activity become *internalized* psychological skills in adults, who, according to Leontiev's study, demonstrate virtually equal mastery of remembering quite a few objects with and without mnemonic aids. According to the logic of these earlier studies, internalization is possible due to the use of a *sign* that facilitates achieving the goal of meaningful activity (e.g., the activity of memorizing) but either does not have a meaning of its own or whose own meaning is irrelevant to the task. Thus, the cycle of experimental studies done by Vygotsky and his associates in the 1920s can be described as cross-sectional or microgenetic (microdevelopmental) research on cultural, sign-mediated development of higher mental functions.

All these experimental studies on the cultural development of psychological functions along with considerable theoretical work done by Vygotsky and his group, resulted in a fairly substantial corpus of publications in the second half of the 1920s and contributed to a comprehensive theory of human development. Thus, Vygotskian theory of development needs to be understood as an ambitious tripartite enterprise that deals with three main lines in the development of behavior: (1) development of humans as a biological species *Homo sapiens* (phylogenesis); (2) cultural development of a community or a nation (culturogenesis); and (3) individual development throughout the life span (ontogenesis). Vygotsky and his associates argued that all three of these kinds of development are interrelated and have effects on each and every person. In their coauthored book, *Studies in the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive, and Child*, Vygotsky and Luria describe their work as three psychological essays united by one idea, that is, the idea of development, and point out that “the behavior of a cultural man ... may be understood and explained scientifically only by analyzing *the three different paths that make up the history of human behavior*” (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1993, p. 36, emphasis in original).

Overall, the second half of the 1920s was the formative period for Vygotsky's new program of psychological research, referred to variously as an instrumental or cultural-historical developmental psychology of higher mental functions.

### VYGOTSKY'S CRISIS (1929–1930)

However, by the end of this decade Vygotsky had already realized numerous flaws, imperfections, and inconsistencies of this nascent system of thought. Vygotsky was not very satisfied with their book, *Studies in the History of Human Behavior: Ape, Primitive, and Child*, begun in 1927 and published in 1930 (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1993). By the end of summer 1929, Vygotsky's coauthor, Alexander Luria, left for the United States to attend the Ninth International Congress of Psychology,

held at Yale University in early September, while Vygotsky stayed in Russia to edit the manuscript in preparation for publication. Vygotsky showed his disappointment with their collaborative work in a letter he sent that summer to another active participant of the Vygotsky–Luria group, Aleksei Leontiev:

I am revising the s[econd] part of “monkey” [i.e., the book *Ape, primitive, and child*]. Alas! The f[irst] chapter is written wholly according to the Freudianists [...]; then the impenetrable Piaget is turned into an absolute beyond all measure; instrument and sign are mixed together even more, and so on and so forth.<sup>o</sup> This is not the fault of A.R. [Luria] personally, but of the entire “epoch” of our thinking. We need to put a stop to this unrelentingly. [...] Let there be the most rigorous, monastic regime of thought; ideological seclusion, if necessary. And let us demand the same of others. Let us explain that studying cultural psychology is no joke, not something to do at odd moments or among other things, and not grounds for every new person’s own conjectures. (Vygotsky, 2007, p. 26)

What was so wrong, for Vygotsky, about their effort at presenting an instrumental theory of cultural development that seemed to have so far convincingly explained the role of culture and sign mediators in human development? Leontiev referred to this episode in his memoirs of mid-1970s as the “unique turn” and as “the study objectively turned around” (Leontiev, 1976/1989, p. 30). This “discovery of meaning” ultimately provoked a new and productive series of experimental studies of meaning and sense-making processes that later considerably changed the entire landscape of Vygotskian psychology of the 1920s. Second, an occasional and almost incidental observation made during the experiments using the instrumental method essentially exploded the whole construction of the theory as it was built by 1929. This was the observation that children in experimental situations not only act to achieve their goal, but at the same time also speak. This discovery was made in preliminary observations of children solving subjectively difficult problems. Vygotsky and Luria suggested that “these observations lead us to the conclusion that *the child solves a practical task with the help of not only eyes and hands, but also speech*” (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1994, p. 109; italics in original).

This seemingly occasional observation and incidental discovery might have been missed by another group of researchers. However, for Vygotsky and his team, this phenomenon was no serendipitous discovery. It was predetermined by their interest in the evolution of cultural forms of children’s behavior and of children’s inventing and using cultural methods and instruments of behavior to solve challenging problems (cf. Luria, 1928/1994) and by Vygotsky’s lifelong passion about the issues of the interrelations among consciousness, language, and thinking. Therefore, not surprisingly having discovered this phenomenon, the group turned it into an object of their research. Vygotsky and Luria presented the first results of this very important study at the Ninth International Psychological Congress

in 1929 under the title *The Function and Fate of Egocentric Speech* (Vygotsky & Luria, 1929/1930). In their 1929 presentation, Vygotsky and Luria challenged Piaget’s views on children’s “private” egocentric speech and argued that the traditional schema of the evolution of explicit speech needs to be dramatically revised. On the basis of their experimental research Vygotsky and Luria suggested that egocentric speech does not simply disappear, being replaced by a socialized form of verbal behavior, but is gradually substituted for by inner speech that assumes the instrumental function of the former.

The investigation of the phenomenon of egocentric speech in the context of problem solving was continued by Vygotsky and Luria’s student Roza Levina, whose findings were briefly reported in various Vygotsky texts. Perhaps the most remarkable discovery made in these investigations was the evolution of children’s speech that is typically addressed to an adult (e.g., an experimenter) by the children of an earlier age and is thus dialogic and social. However, this social and dialogic speech later transforms into egocentric, planning speech that in the absence of a participating experimenter reenacts dialogue between the child and the knowledgeable other in older children. Then, egocentric speech gradually disappears or, in terminology of cultural-historical scholars, gets internalized in children of early school age (see Levina, 1968/1998). In this sense, in contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky and his team discovered the genetically dialogic nature of human thinking.

These studies on egocentric speech provided a concrete illustration of consciousness as an introspective system of social relationships (the idea of Karl Marx) and consciousness as an internal dialogue (Vygotsky cited noted Russian linguist Lev Shcherba for whom “speech is always a dialogue”). (See Vygotsky’s notes in Zavershneva, 2010a, p. 26.) Vygotsky cherished this idea as early as the mid-1920s, as is evident from his private notebooks where he reflected on the idea of consciousness as a dialogue with oneself that apparently predated and anticipated these studies of the 1930s. Yet, it was only in the beginning of the 1930s—when Vygotsky and his associates found a concrete empirical instantiation of these ideas—that they arrived at the possibility of conducting psychological research *proper* on the complicated issues of the interrelations between consciousness, language and speech, thinking, volition, and emotion. These ideas in their more refined formulations of the early 1930s are exemplified by Vygotsky’s famous yet still poorly understood statement on the general law of human development (the origin of which Vygotsky attributed to French scholar and clinician Pierre Janet):

In general we might say that the relations between higher mental functions once were genuine relations between people. I relate to myself like people relate to me.... Every function in the cultural behavior of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as interpsychological category, then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (translated by Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000, p. 370)

On the verge of new theoretical breakthroughs, Vygotsky was desperately struggling to name his theory and was reflecting on a number of options to give his psychological theory a distinctive name but “because of the internal lack of clarity”

<sup>o</sup> The first two sections of the book were written by Vygotsky; the third one was authored by Luria. Thus, the reference to the first chapter of the second part seems to be to the beginning of Luria’s section on child development.

not fully satisfied with any of the options such as “instrumental,” “cultural,” “significant,” “structural,” or “historical” psychology, or “psychology of higher functions.” Around 1930, Vygotsky dwelled on a most awkward option for the theory’s designation of “historical theory of the development of higher psychological functions” (Vygotsky, quoted in Zavershneva, 2010a, p. 30). However, a year later the notion of *higher psychological function* had considerably lost its appeal as the central theoretical concept, although it still remained in the conceptual framework of the theory. Vygotsky’s dissatisfaction with the accomplishments of the “instrumental,” “cultural-historical” theory by the end of the 1920s, and his perceived need for a revision of the entire theoretical system resulted in a major breakthrough for Vygotsky at the beginning of the 1930s. This theoretical and experimental breakthrough, however, coincided with yet another significant break—famously referred to as Stalin’s Great Break.

### SOCIAL AND THEORETICAL EXPLOSION (1930–1934): TOWARD A NEW THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERSONALITY

The end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s represent a significant change in the entire design and structure of the Soviet Union’s national culture and economy. The Great Break that was announced by Joseph Stalin at the end of 1929 brought about the collectivization (deprivatization of large and middle-size farms, and agricultural households transformed into collective and state farms, *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*), forced industrialization, and renationalization of the private sector of the economy and the introduction of central planning, which marked the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1920s. Historians and Sovietologists interpret these events as the beginning of an era of systematic political repressions leading to Stalin’s Great Purges and an unprecedented period of modernization of the country’s entire social system. Clearly, for science as a social institution in the USSR the Great Break began a period of increasing involvement of state power in science and a growing control over scientific research that culminated in rigid patron–client relations between the ruling Bolshevik bureaucracy and the scientific establishment and, ultimately, in the creation of a gigantic Soviet hybrid of party-state-Big Science topped by the behemoth Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. In practice, the Great Break and the beginning of centralization in scientific research in the early 1930s in the Soviet Union marked the launch of numerous public discussions in philosophy and, somewhat later, in the humanities and social and natural sciences—representatives of which aimed to define the politically and philosophically correct ways of conducting scientific research according to the principles of Marxist–Leninist dialectical materialism, which was the only philosophical, theoretical, and methodological position allowed in the USSR in the 1930s. Simultaneously, the many new psychoneurological disciplines like psychology, paedology, psychotechnics, reflexology, psychotherapy, and psychohygiene that had flourished and proliferated in the Soviet Union in the decade of 1920s—lavishly supported by the Bolsheviks in their attempt to rapidly modernize a technology-driven economy—dwindled to a few

administratively controlled and planned disciplines unified within only a few highly hierarchical organizational structures (Krementsov, 1997).

### *Vicissitudes of Vygotskian Psychology in the Early 1930s*

Vygotsky and his group were both active and enthusiastic participants in and, simultaneously, victims of theoretical discussions in the early 1930s: Although never officially banned, as were some other psychoneurological disciplines (e.g., Kornilov’s *reactology* and Bekhterev’s *reflexology* or, later, the discipline of paedology), Vygotsky and Luria’s theory of cultural development of higher mental functions was severely criticized in the Soviet newspeak parlance of the time for its “idealism” and “right[wing] deviation” (cf. van der Veer, 2000). The Vygotsky and Luria project fell out of favor with the domestic patrons of science, and most members of their group suffered from two notable processes: the “truncation of collaboration” and the decline of their publications in the early 1930s.

A group of Vygotsky’s students known as the *pyaterka* (i.e., “the five”)—Zaporozhets, Bozhovich, Slavina, Levina, and Morozova—graduated in 1930, and thereafter the group was dispersed due to the lack of an organizational structure and funding to hold the group together in a research center in Moscow and also due to the requirement of graduates’ mandatory employment. Another loss for Vygotsky was the departure of a group of his students and associates (Luria, Leontiev, Zaporozhets, and Bozhovich) from Moscow to Kharkov in the end of 1931. In 1932, this group began to establish a sector of psychology at the newly founded Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy and to lead psychological research in the capital of Soviet Ukraine (Yasnitsky & Ferrari, 2008a, 2008b).

In an attempt to compensate for the shortage of collaborative research opportunities, Vygotsky and Luria initiated an unprecedented study on how rapid social changes in the traditional society of Central Asia during its modernization after the Bolshevik revolution affected the cognitive development of its population. They organized and undertook two psychological expeditions to Central Asia in summer 1931 and 1932. Vygotsky, who in spring 1929 made a trip to lecture at the Middle-Asian State University (SAGU) in Tashkent, initially had planned to participate too, but for reasons that remain unclear he did not actually make the trips with Luria and his research team. Perhaps seeking to establish an improved national profile and looking for some international acclaim and recognition for this project, Luria advertised in both German and English in a number of publications in such Western academic journals as *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie*, *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *Character and Personality*, and *Science*. In addition, a number of Western scholars, including Wolfgang Köhler, Kurt Koffka, and Kurt Lewin were personally invited to join; only Koffka took part in the second trip of 1932. These expeditions did, however, provoke a great deal of rage among the Soviet militant materialist critics of the Vygotsky–Luria project in 1932–33, and the results of these studies were not published until the mid-1970s (Luria, 1976).

Worse yet, Vygotsky’s archives contain a wealth of extremely interesting materials written by him in the 1930s—some still, in fact, unpublished—but after their collaborative *Studies in the History of Human Behaviour* (Vygotsky &

Luria, 1930/1993) Vygotsky's publication rate dropped dramatically and, with the exception of several textbooks and curriculum materials, neither his major works written around 1929–1931 (e.g., *History of the development of higher mental functions*, *Tool and symbol in child development*) nor most of his smaller papers were published during his lifetime. Even his most famous book, *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky, 1934/1987), the last major *oeuvre* and swan song scheduled to appear in 1932 was indeterminately delayed. Vygotsky and Luria made numerous attempts to publish their work in foreign languages through their connections abroad. However, only some of their attempts were successful (e.g., Jacob Kasanin's translation of Vygotsky's 1932 paper on schizophrenia that came out in 1934; Vygotsky, 1934), and in large part most of their attempts failed.

From the early 1930s Vygotsky seemed to be strained financially, accepting numerous temporary arrangements with publishing houses and contracts for part-time editorial work that apparently provided an important source of extra income in the Vygotsky family; therefore, the shortage of publication projects meant financial losses for Vygotsky. Then a number of Vygotsky's jobs were cut in the early 1930s, when organizations where he was employed closed down or were restructured. In search of extra wages to support his family, and to compensate for these losses he had to take a teaching position at the Leningrad State Pedagogical Institute, commuting between Moscow and Leningrad—staying in each of the two cities for a couple of weeks each month—and making occasional trips to Kharkov from 1931 until his final days. At a certain point, Vygotsky was even considering a move to Sukhumi, Georgia, lured by an invitation to take a job at the local Center for the Study of Primates—but these plans never materialized.

Yet these last years of Vygotsky's life were particularly important for him: He worked on a comprehensive cross-disciplinary theory of consciousness, personality, and cultural development. Let us have a look at the contours of this emergent theory as it was presented in various rare Vygotsky publications and numerous yet mostly unpublished archival documents of the time.

### *The Interdependence of Clinical and Developmental Research: Psychological Systems*

From the beginning of the 1930s two lines of Vygotsky's psychological research—the genetic (i.e., research on normal development) and the pathological (i.e. defectological, clinical studies on psychological regression understood as “disintegration” of complex psychological systems, developmental and speech pathology, and rehabilitation)—represent the two interrelated sides of the new integrated Vygotskian research program: “Pathology is the key to understanding development and development is the key to understanding pathological changes” (Vygotsky, 1931/1998, p. 152). This new research program—toward cultural-historical psychology of consciousness and personality—was articulated in a landmark talk on *psychological systems* presented at the Clinic of Nervous Diseases of the I Moscow State University in October of 1930. This novel idea of psychological systems—that Vygotsky confessed to have “nourished during a number of years but hesitated to

express fully” (Vygotsky, 1930/1997, p. 107)—“surpasses in complexity the system of concepts with which we have operated thus far” (p. 91). In his presentation to his colleagues and collaborators, Vygotsky critically reviewed their studies on isolated psychological functions (e.g., memory, attention, perception) and proposed a new object of research, *psychological systems*:

In the process of development, and in historical development in particular, it is not so much the functions which change (these we mistakenly studied before). Their structure and the system of their development remain the same. What is changed and modified are rather the relationships, the links between the functions. New constellations emerge which were unknown in the preceding stage. (Vygotsky, 1930/1997, p. 92)

This conclusion made Vygotsky revise the notion of *higher psychological functions* that he previously understood as cultural, sign-mediated, yet isolated higher-order psychological functions. In 1930s, Vygotsky revised his earlier ideas of hierarchical relations between the higher (“cultural”) and the lower (“natural,” “elementary”) psychological functions and postulated that “the higher psychological functions are not superimposed as a second storey over the elementary processes, but represent new psychological systems which include a complex knot of elementary functions” (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1994, p. 140). To illustrate what he meant by *psychological systems*, Vygotsky discussed “sensorimotor unity” (the unity of intertwined perception and motion) in apes, very young children, or, in case of psychological regression, “adults in whom these processes are closest to the affective ones” (Vygotsky, 1930/1997, p. 93). In older children, the unity of perception and motor functions dissolves, giving place to the interconnection of perception and thinking, a psychological system of “visual thinking.” Then, at the next stage of the child's development, Vygotsky argued, the unity of thinking and perception is overtaken by a unity of thinking and memory, or the psychological system of “logical memory” that forms in children around the end of primary school. The discovery of psychological systems was essential for Vygotsky and laid solid foundation for all his subsequent work of the 1930s.

### *Toward the Biosocial Synthesis: Person Within Social Environment*

In the 1930s, Vygotsky, founder of the cultural-historical theory and professor of developmental and child psychology, turned to the study of biological aspects of child development and, along with Luria, became an extramural student at the Medical Department of the Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy in Kharkov. In this period, many studies were completed under Vygotsky's supervision by his associates (most notably, Luria, Lebedinskii, Zankov, R. Levina, Boskis, Pevzner, Morozova, Birenbaum, and Zeigarnik) in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov. These studies were typically published under the students' names. The studies reveal the magnitude of Vygotsky's project of the theory of sociobiological development and cover an impressive list of topics, such as oligophrenia, aphasia and speech

pathology, hysteria, schizophrenia and other psychiatric disorders, and the problem of the interrelation between biogenetic and environmental factors as evidenced by the research on identical twins.

On the other hand, their earlier research on social and private (egocentric) speech of the child, experimental research on concept formation, and many other studies on sign-mediated cultural development significantly contributed to discovery of the leading role of interpersonal communication, human activity, and, generally, environmental factors in child development. For Vygotsky—for instance, for his great contemporary, friend, and correspondent German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin—“in the investigation of the fundamental dynamic relations between the individual and the environment, it is essential to keep constantly in mind the actual total situation in its concrete individuality” (Lewin, 1935, p. 68). However, to distinguish between the larger social and the immediate environment of an individual and, thus, environmental settings of macro- and microdevelopment (i.e., life span development as opposed to the change in abilities, knowledge, and understanding during short time spans), Vygotsky introduced the notions of an age-specific *social situation of development* and the *zone of proximal development* of the child.

Thus, the *social situation of development* that emerges by the beginning of each specific age period denotes “a completely original, exclusive, single, and unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality that surrounds him” (Vygotsky, 1934/1998, p. 198; see also Bozhovich, 1968/2009). Reflections on the social situation of development and observations of children’s involvement in various activities led Vygotsky to his hypothesis of *leading activity*, that is, to the specific activity that boosts and leads development of the child, like, for instance, *play activity* for preschoolers or properly organized *learning activity* for the children of early school age (Vygotsky, 1933/1967). The notion of the *social situation of development* figures prominently in Vygotsky’s “pedological” writings of the 1930s on age periods and crises in child development that laid the foundation for Vygotskian developmental *stage theory*. Vygotskian stage theory, unlike the celebrated stage theory of his contemporary Jean Piaget, accounted for the wide range of cultural, social, behavioral, and biological factors as well as cognitive, emotional, and volitional aspects of personality development. Most prominently this theory was later developed by Vygotsky’s former students and collaborators Daniil Elkonin and Lidiya Bozhovich and their associates (Bozhovich, 1968/2009, 1978/2004, 1979/2004a, 1979/2004b; Elkonin, 1971/1999; Slobodchikov & Tsukerman, 2003).

In comparison with Vygotsky’s notion of the *social situation of development* and his macrodevelopmental works, the notion of the *zone of proximal development* is considerably better known and far more often discussed (Valsiner & van der Veer, 1993). Ever since the publication of the book *Mind in Society*, the zone of proximal development has been understood as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Several remarkable illustrations of Vygotsky’s notion of the “zone of proximal development”

can be found in his presentations and unpublished writings of 1932–34 (Chaiklin, 2003). Thus, according to Vygotsky:

In child development that which it is possible to achieve at the end as the result of the developmental process, is already available in the environment from the very beginning. And it is not simply present in the environment from the very start, but it exerts an influence on the very first steps in the child’s development. (Vygotsky, 1933/1994, pp. 347–348)

Elsewhere, Vygotsky discusses what he refers to as the driving force of development and, at the same time, the principal contradiction of child development: the distinction between the actual development of a child and an *ideal form*, a notion that is extremely important for understanding what Vygotsky meant by “zone of proximal development.” A perfect example of such an ideal form is, for Vygotsky, human language: Indeed, language exists before the child is born, the child is exposed to it from the very first days of her life, and it definitely interferes with her development, typically through dialogue with the mother, being a major instrument of transformation of psychological processes of infants into the distinctly human higher order psychological systems of older children. Thus, an ideal form interacts with the actually developing one; for instance, the child’s one-word sentence is part of a dialogue with her mother’s “ideal speech” (i.e., the child’s speech in potential) (Vygotsky’s unpublished notes of 1932–33, quoted by Zavershneva, 2010b, p. 50).

### *Units of Analysis: Word Meaning and Perezhivanie*

In his continuous quest for a nonreductionist cultural psychology that would equally well account for physiological and environmental aspects of human development, Vygotsky was particularly sensitive to the issue of identifying a *unit of analysis* that would preserve all qualities of the inseparable whole, like a molecule of water still remains water, and cannot be reduced to a simple combination of hydrogen and oxygen. Vygotsky argued that each specific research problem requires a specific unit of analysis. Thus, for instance, to investigate the interrelation between speech and thinking in their indivisible unity, Vygotsky proposed *word meaning* as such a unit: On one hand, “meaning of a word is a part of the word, a speech formation, because a word without meaning is not a word,” and, on the other hand, “since all meaning of a word is a generalization, it is a product of the intellectual activity of the child” (Vygotsky, 1933/1998, p. 294).

Yet, in 1933 and early 1934, Vygotsky was primarily focused on his ultimate goal—the emergent theory of consciousness and it is from this perspective that Vygotsky conceived the research on the interrelations between environment and personality, the problem that became of primary importance for him. Vygotsky struggled to find a unit for the analysis of such interrelations so that neither the complexity of the interconnections of intellect, affect, and will nor the agency of an individual in the environment is lost. Around mid-1933, he finally identified such a unit: *perezhivanie*, a Russian word with its mixed meaning of either

“emotional experience” or “emotional sense-making” that literally translates as “living through.”<sup>6</sup> For Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* is “a unity of the personality and the environment as it is represented in development” that needs to be understood as the internal<sup>1</sup> relation of the child as a person to one aspect or another of reality. It a biosocial phenomenon; that is, “it is what lies between personality and the environment,” does not exist in itself but is always *perezhivanie* of something, and shows what a given event or a situation of the environment means for the person. In sum, according to Vygotsky, environment affects development of the child through *perezhivanie* of the environment (Vygotsky, 1933/1998, p. 294). *Perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis of person in the environment requires from research that it “ought to be able to find the relationship which exists between the child and its environment, the child’s emotional experience [*perezhivanie*], in other words how a child becomes aware of, interprets, [and] emotionally relates to a certain event” (Vygotsky, 1933/1994, p. 341, italics in original).

The writings of 1932–34 of Vygotsky and some of his associates (e.g., Luria, Birenbaum, Zeigarnik, Lebedinskii, Zaporozhets, Asnin) reveal their rapidly growing interest in the issues of *awareness, interpretation, meaning, and sense-making*, and abound with such somewhat cryptic expressions as “dynamic semantic systems” that represent the “unity of affective and intellectual processes,” “affective-dynamic systems” and “affective-volitional sphere,” “semantic perception,” “ideal form,” “visual” versus “semantic fields,” “imaginary situation,” “zone of proximal development,” “*semic* (i.e., semantic, or semiotic) analysis,” “systemic and semantic structure of consciousness.”

However, much of Vygotsky’s theoretical work of the 1930s was never finished, nor was it properly operationalized or rigorously experimentally tested during Vygotsky’s lifetime. Gravely ill, Vygotsky spent the last 3 years of his life intensely working against all odds on his nascent developmental theory of personality and consciousness. His major book on the psychology of emotions, dedicated to Spinoza, was never completed. The famous volume of collected papers of 1929–1934 that had previously been partially published and eventually came out posthumously under the title *Thinking and Speech* (1934/1987), according to Vygotsky, presented only an introduction to a larger not yet completed theory of consciousness. Indeed, in the conclusion of this book Vygotsky refers to future prospects for his research, stating that their investigation had brought them to the threshold of a problem of consciousness that is broader, more profound, and still more extraordinary than the problem of thinking (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p. 285). Regrettably, the theory of consciousness in its cultural and biosocial development

<sup>6</sup> To avoid the “loss in translation,” van der Veer and Valsiner (1994) in *Vygotsky Reader* preserved the transliterated Russian word in brackets throughout the text and provided the following explanatory note: “The Russian term serves to express the idea that one and the same objective situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived through by different children in different ways. Neither ‘emotional experience’ (which is used here and which only covers the affective aspect of the meaning of *perezhivanie*), nor ‘interpretation’ (which is too exclusively rational) are fully adequate translations of the noun. Its meaning is closely linked to that of the German verb ‘*erleben*’ (cf. ‘*Erlebnis*’, ‘*erlebte Wirklichkeit*’)” (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 354).

<sup>1</sup> There is a grave error in the 1998 translation of the text: the Russian word *vnutrennij* (internal) of the original was rendered as external. This mistake of translation is corrected here.

was not completed, and to date there is no book—neither by Vygotsky nor by any of his students or followers—that summarizes and explicitly unifies these diverse yet intrinsically interrelated ideas, and presents a nonreductionist psychological project of such enormous breadth and ambition. Without a doubt, future publication of such an important work may well be one of the most long-awaited, inspiring, and groundbreaking contributions to contemporary psychology of the 21st century.

## VYGOTSKY AFTER VYGOTSKY

By the end of 1933 Vygotsky was a prolific author, a devoted lecturer, and an enthusiastic researcher, yet he was stressed and frustrated by the campaigns of public criticism and continuous interrogations. However, the outlook was to change significantly after November 1933. On November 26, 1933, Vygotsky was officially hired as head of the Department of Clinical Psychology at the Moscow branch of the newly reorganized All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine (VIEM). This new appointment was followed by a surge in Vygotsky’s publications starting at the beginning of 1934 as evidenced by his books, *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky, 1934/1987), *Foundations of Paedology* (Moscow, 1934 and Leningrad, 1935), and a collection of Vygotsky’s papers, *Mental Development of Children in the Process of Education* (1935), not to mention smaller works.

Full of plans, at the beginning of 1934 Vygotsky was working intensely: He was organizing the new research unit, teaching, doing research, and writing papers. However, many of these plans were not realized. Due to the aggravation of his medical condition caused by a chronic tuberculosis outbreak, Vygotsky was brought home from his new workplace, prescribed bed rest on May 9, and was later hospitalized on June 2. Vygotsky stayed in the hospital until his sudden yet predictable death on June 11, 1934.

Recognized at his death as one of the leading Marxist thinkers of the time—ironically, just half a year after he had been ostracized, largely neglected, and an almost forgotten scholar with a dubious reputation of an “idealist” in the Bolshevik state at the time of Stalinism on the rise—Vygotsky was buried on June 13, 1934, at Novodevich’e Cemetery, a prestigious national cemetery for the most coveted politicians, military leaders, artists, and scientists. As a burial site, it is second in prestige only to the Kremlin Wall Necropolis. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s brain was stored in the Moscow Brain Research Institute’s “Pantheon of Brains”: a collection of “elite brains” of the most prominent figures in Soviet culture, science, and government, including the brain of the Head of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin. Given such impressive posthumous recognition, it seems safe to assume that by the middle of 1934, Vygotsky was poised as a leader of the Soviet “historical” truly Marxist psychology.

After his death, Vygotsky’s former collaborators and associates published quite a number of Vygotsky’s as well as their own works under the banner of the continuation of Vygotsky’s research. Thus, the period of 1934 to the first half of 1936 can be referred to as the “Golden Age” of Vygotskian psychology in the pre-WWII period. However, this did not last long: On July 4, 1936, the Central Committee of

the Communist Party issued a special decree prohibiting the discipline of paedology in the country. Because of his notable involvement with paedology, Vygotsky's legacy, yet again, was put on trial: It was semiofficially outlawed or, perhaps more precisely, muffled. A full 20 years later the publication of one of Vygotsky's book, amid the cold war, became one of the first signs of a relative liberation in the country, known as the Thaw, and marked the post-Stalinist period of revival of psychology as a discipline in the Soviet Union. It also marked the beginning of the Vygotsky boom, evident by the countless posthumous attempts to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct "the real Vygotsky" from the second half of the 20th century onward. However, this is an entirely different story, the most recent and exciting developments of which we are witnessing today, right now.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (1991). *Understanding Vygotsky. A quest for synthesis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

This is a classic social and intellectual history of Vygotsky and his scientific legacy that remains the best book about Vygotsky to date. Vygotsky's life from his earlier years in Gomel until his last days is discussed against social background of the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s. The book presents the life story of Vygotsky chronologically and thematically, covering such topics as Vygotsky's "Psychology of Art" and "Pedagogical Psychology" of the mid-1920s and educational psychology of the early 1930s, his involvement with psychoanalysis, reactology, Gestalt psychology, cross-cultural research, cultural-historical psychology, defectology, and paedology. It is mandatory reading for anybody interested in Vygotsky's theory and its historical development.

Rieber, R. W., & Wollock, J. (Eds.). (1997). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky. Vol. 3. Problems of the theory and history of psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.

This book belongs to a six-volume collection of Vygotsky's works published in Russian in the early 1980s in Soviet Union and later published in English by Plenum Press in the 1980s–1990s. The translation of the first volume of the original Russian edition presents a collection of a range of Vygotsky's theoretical and methodological works written throughout his lifetime. Virtually impeccable translation and excellent meticulous comments by Van der Veer make this the best volume of the six-volume collection.

Van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (1994). *The Vygotsky reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

This book presents most of his works published (or planned for publication) in English during 1925–1934. This is a well-balanced set of papers representative of the development of Vygotsky's thought from his earlier somewhat radical and "reformist" papers until the last days of his life. The *Vygotsky Reader* can be used as the main source book for any course on Vygotskian or cultural-historical psychology of biosocial human development.

## ENDNOTE

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