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Guest Editor's Introduction

“Archival Revolution” in Vygotskian Studies? Uncovering Vygotsky's Archives

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896–1934) is undeniably among the most popular pioneers of psychology of all time. Vygotsky is revered, admired, and often perceived as an utmost authority in quite a few fields of research in human sciences from early childhood education to psycholinguistics and neuropsychology. In other words, it is clear that Lev Vygotsky has become a cult figure for a large number of intellectuals.

The beginning of the cult of Vygotsky, which is also referred to as the “Vygotsky boom” (Cole, 2004; Garai and Kocsik, 1995), dates back to 1978 when the book *Mind in Society* (1978) came out under Vygotsky's name, and noted British and American philosopher Stephen Toulmin published his programmatic book review titled “The Mozart of Psychology” (Toulmin, 1978), where he referred to Lev Vygotsky as the Mozart of psychology, and to his right-hand man and co-worker, Alexander Romanovich Luria, as Beethoven. Whereas the second part of this comparison was eventually largely forgotten, the association between the genius of Mozart and that of Vygotsky seems to have survived and remains one of the commonplaces of contemporary historiography (or rather “mythology,” as some claim) of Soviet psychology. After the publication of *Mind in Society*, the celebrated notion of the “zone of proximal development” became perhaps the best-known concept associated with Vygotsky worldwide.

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Interestingly enough, Vygotsky never actually wrote the version of his most famous book published in the West as *Mind in Society*: the book is a compilation and juxtaposition of fragments taken from different Vygotsky works written during different periods of his scientific career. Several times in their preface the editors confess that they “constructed” some chapters of the book, whereas other chapters “summarize” or are “based on” Vygotsky’s actual writings (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, and Souberman, 1978). Furthermore, the editors explain that “at several places [we] have inserted material from additional sources in order to more fully explicate the meaning of the text. . . . In a few cases passages have been taken from the work of Vygotsky’s students or collaborators which provide concrete examples of experimental procedures or results which the original text describes with extreme brevity. . . . In putting separate essays together we have taken significant liberties. The reader will encounter here not a literal translation of Vygotsky, from which we have omitted material that seemed redundant and to which we have added material that seemed to make his points clearer.” And, finally, the editors add: “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).

It is often little understood that what is perhaps Vygotsky’s most famous concept in the West, the “zone of proximal development,” is far from central to the entire system of his thought and occupies just a few dozen pages within the six-volume collection of Vygotsky’s works (Chaiklin, 2003; Tudge, 1999). Still, it remains “one of the most used and least understood constructs to appear in contemporary educational literature” (Palincsar, 1998, p. 370), and, as some argue, “there is a danger that the term is used as little more than a fashionable alternative to Piagetian terminology or the concept of IQ for describing individual differences in attainment or potential” (Mercer and Fisher, 1992, p. 342).

The Vygotsky boom was already apparent at the end of the 1980s, and as early as 1988 Jaan Valsiner remarked in his book about the inverse relation between the popularity of Vygotsky’s theory and its understanding (Valsiner, 1988). The arguably most comprehensive account of Vygotsky’s theory and intellectual history of cultural-historical theory during Vygotsky’s lifetime to date was published in a separate book by René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner almost twenty years ago. On the very first page of the book, the authors warned about the dangers of claims about the “‘genius’-like nature of Vygotsky,” which might be “a good means of advertising but perhaps not conducive to an understanding of the content and implications of the ideas of the ‘genius.’” As a result of such uncritical attitudes and admiration of the

“genius,” oftentimes “Vygotsky is credited with ‘being 50 years ahead of his time’ for ideas that he himself credited to his predecessors of the 1890s and early 1900s” (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, p. 1). In a more recent book, the authors observe that the popularity of Vygotsky is often explained by the contemporary fashion for sociogenetic ideas and argue that the majority of references to Vygotsky—as well as some other authors—are in fact nothing more than “declarations of faith”:

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, it has become acceptable (even fashionable . . .) to consider human psychological functions as social in their nature. Often this position is simply declared by brief, but frequently glorifying, references to thinkers from the past who held such a position. Oftentimes, the names of Lev Vygotsky, George Herbert Mead, and others are used to emphasize the social nature of human psychological functions. Declarations of faith are, of course often made in conjunction with evoking an authority figure: “as X (e.g., Vygotsky, Mead, Tom Sawyer, Marx) showed, the mind is A (e.g., social), and not B (e.g., biologically determined).” (Valsiner and Van der Veer, 2000, pp. 3–4)

Furthermore, the multitude and, even more important, the diversity of contemporary interpretations of Vygotsky make some authors discuss the “versions of Vygotsky” (Gillen, 2000) and go as far as to pessimistically question whether anybody actually reads Vygotsky’s own words these days (Gredler and Schields, 2004).

Yet, the situation is not as desperate as it may look. Following perestroika in the second half of 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war in 1991, interest in Soviet studies and related topics declined and Soviet psychology per se gradually lost its appeal as an exotic scientific trend. At the same time, it seems that the perception of Vygotsky among international scholars has also changed over the past couple of decades. The image of the “solitary genius” of Vygotsky is fading and we are arguably witnessing the birth of a new field of Vygotskian studies (in Russian: *vygotskovedenie*) that is based on the ideas of “distributed cognition (intelligence, expertise)” (Salomon, 1997), the cultural and collaborative origin of scientific theories and practices, a developmental transition from the “inter-” to the “intramental” plane (Vygotsky, 1931/1997), the essential “interdependence” of scientific ideas (Valsiner and Van der Veer, 2000), and similar notions. In other words, the perspective of the “cultural-historical approach to cultural-historical psychology” (Cole, 1996; Stetsenko, 2003, 2004; Stetsenko and Arieviditch, 2004; Valsiner and Van der Veer, 2000) seems to be gaining momentum today, and quite a few recent publications present excellent examples of this integrative and cultural approach to the Vygotskian scientific legacy. Among the most characteristic of

recent publications illustrating the growth and institutionalization of the field of Vygotskian studies published in the past decade are an annotated compilation of Vygotsky's works, *Essential Vygotsky* (2004), edited by Robert W. Rieber and David K. Robinson in collaboration with Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole, Joseph Glick, Carl Ratner, and Anna Stetsenko; the new, revised edition of *An Introduction to Vygotsky* (2005), edited by Harry Daniels; and *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* (2007), edited by Daniels, Cole, and James V. Wertsch. These and many other new works currently being published give new insights into the cultural-historical theory of the development of higher mental functions developed by Vygotsky and his numerous collaborators and associates, and undermine the traditional "insider" (Kurt Danziger) hagiographic narratives about Vygotsky who "single-handedly" changed the psychological thought of the twentieth century. Two notable trends, in particular, characterize the rapidly growing field of Vygotskian studies.

First, the focus has shifted from Vygotsky as such to Vygotsky as the leading representative of a dense "personal network" (Adams, 2001) of scholars that shared research agendas, views on methods of psychological research, and approaches to the development of scientific theory. They worked in parallel in several cities of the Soviet Union—chiefly in Moscow, Kharkov, and Leningrad—and frequently traveled 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 and especially after his death—both in the Soviet Union and internationally. Thus, the object of Vygotskian studies is the entire network of the scholars of the Vygotsky Circle against the background of the sociocultural environment of Big Science (Kojevnikov, 2004; Kremontsov, 1997) in the interwar period and after World War II, interpersonal relations between the protagonists, their scientific and social practices, and competing research agendas of different groupings within the larger network of Vygotskian scholars. This huge network of protagonists includes Lev Vygotsky and his firsthand collaborators Alexander Luria, Sergei Eisenstein, Nikolai Bernstein, Leonid Zankov, Ivan Solov'ev (alias Solov'ev-El'pidinskii), Vera Schmidt, Roza Averbukh, Leonid Sakharov, Boris Varshava, Vladimir Kogan, Mark Lebedinskii, Aleksei Leontiev, Yuliya Kotelova, Alexander Zaporozhets, Vladimir Asnin, Lidia Bozhovich, Liya Slavina, Roza Levina, Nataliya Morozova, Gita Birenbaum, Blyuma Zeigarnik, Nikolai Samukhin, Rakhil' Boskis, Mariia Pevzner, Zhozefina Shif, Liya Geshelina, M.A. Levina, K.I. Veresotskaia, M.B. Eidinova, Esfir' Bejn, Daniil Elkonin, Filipp Bassin, and Piotr Galperin, to mention but a few. Thus, a number of studies that shed some light on the cultural environment and scientific practices of the larger Vygotsky Circle have been published recently in Russian (Bogdanchikov, 2007; Bulgakova, 2007; Feigenberg,

2004; Gutkina, 2008; Korepanova, 2008a, 2008b; Mescheriakov, 2007; Munipov, 2006; Shchedrovitskii, 2004; Yasnitsky 2008, 2009) and in English (Bakhurst, 2007; Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008; Van der Veer, 2007a, 2007b; Yasnitsky and Ferrari, 2008a, 2008b; Zeigarnik, 2007).

Second, the “anthropological turn” (Prokhorova 2009) in Vygotskian Studies calls for the systematic and rigorous exploration of largely unexplored archival sources—along with both unpublished and recorded oral histories that constitute one of the major sources of data on the history and theory of Vygotskian studies to date. The “Archival Revolution” that made many archives available to scholars of Soviet studies in the 1990s (Khlevniuk, 2001), of which the history of Soviet science is an integral part, seems also to have reached the field of Vygotskian studies. For one thing, the exploration of archival materials—and, specifically, private notes and correspondence between scholars—is considerably important to those doing research on scientific networks. On the other hand, archival work promises many discoveries of unpublished texts authored by prominent scholars of the past. These texts provide new insights into the intellectual history of cultural-historical theory, the sociocultural environment at the time of its inception and development, the technology of knowledge production, and the scientific and social practices of Vygotskian scholars. A number of works published in the past two decades are indicative of considerable advancements with respect to the archives of the main actors of the Vygotsky Circle. Thus, as a result of a tide of recent publications, we now have access to a wealth of newly discovered and previously unpublished documents and scientific works of Lev Vygotsky (Feigenberg, 2000; Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1996; Vygotsky, 1996, 2001; Vygotsky and Puzyrej, 2004), Nikolai Bernstein (2003), Aleksei N. Leontiev (1994, 2003; also Leontiev, Leontiev, and Sokolova, 2005), Aleksander Luria (Luria, 2003), Piotr Zinchenko (1938/2009), Piotr Galperin (1935/2009, 1938/2009), Lidiia Bozhovich (1935/2006a, 1935/2006b, 1935/2006c), Bozhovich and Slavina (1929/2007a, 1929/2007b, 1929/2007c, 1929/2008), among others. The *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* is making continuous efforts to bring some of these recent archival publications to English readers—for instance, Vygodskaya and Lifanova’s book *Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, 1999, vol. 37, nos. 2–5)*, as well as in special issues of the journal on the legacy of A.N. Leontiev (*Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, 2005, vol. 43, nos. 3 and 4*) and L.S. Vygotsky (*Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, 2007, 45, no. 2*).

Yet, the “Archival Revolution” in Vygotskian studies is also motivated by the long perceived need for revision of the publications that are questionable in terms of reliability and trustworthiness: many foundational texts, most

notably the works of Lev Vygotsky, underwent considerable editing—if not censorship—in the Soviet publications of 1950s through 1980s. Numerous omissions and even distortions of meaning of the original texts have been noted by numerous researchers (Mecacci, 1990; Peshkov, 1999, 2008; Tkachenko, 1983; Tulviste, 1987; Van der Veer, 1992, 1997; Zavershneva, 2009). Thus, in his introduction to volume 3 of *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology), the translator and editor of the volume, René van der Veer, specifically addressed the problems of the reliability of Soviet publications of available Vygotsky texts:

Soviet republications of original texts published in [the] 1920s or 1930s tend to be notoriously sloppy and long lists of errors could be compiled. Most of these errors are of minor importance and regard, for example, the orthography. Others are most annoying and concern deleted references to authors now out of favor (e.g., Trotsky, Watson) and the suppression of unacceptable terms (e.g., pedology). . . . We may conclude that the status of works published under the name of Vygotsky has not always been sufficiently clear and that scholarly editions have been exceedingly rare. . . . [Furthermore,] the Russian editors of Vygotsky's *Collected Works* [of 1982–84] have done little to solve the problems listed above. They did not attempt to unearth thus far known writings by Vygotsky, did not question the reliability of the texts used, made use of unreliable republications (e.g., in the case of *Thinking and Speech*), and in republishing original publications introduced mistakes of their own. This does not diminish the value of the work they accomplished (e.g., the tremendous number of useful notes), but it should make us realize that the critical and scholarly reception of Vygotsky's writings is still in its infancy. (Van der Veer, 1997, p. 2)

Vygotskian studies have come of age and outgrown textological infancy: the problem of the virtual lack of scholarly work on the archival sources of Vygotsky's republished works has been addressed recently. Thus, we now have fairly trustworthy Russian editions of Vygotsky's *Myshlenie i rech'* [Thinking and Speech] (1999), and *Psikhologiya iskusstva* [Psychology of Art] (2008), published by Labirint in Russia. Whereas a study comparing the different editions of *Thinking and Speech* is reportedly still in progress, a list of all later editorial changes and additions to Vygotsky's *Istoricheskii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa* [Historical Meaning of Psychological Crisis] has been compiled and published most recently in the Russian psychology journal *Voprosy psikhologii* (Zavershneva and Osipov, 2010), along with a comparative analysis of the manuscript and published version of the text (Zavershneva, 2009). This study was done by a small group of Russian scholars led by Eka-

terina Zavershneva whose research addresses all three areas of archival work in Vygotskian studies as outlined above: (1) analysis of Vygotskian scholarship against the cultural background of the interwar period, (2) publication of unpublished archival materials, and (3) textological research on Soviet publications and republication of Vygotsky's works.

In this issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* on the "Archival Revolution" in Vygotskian Studies, we present Western readers with the first published English translations of Ekaterina Zavershneva's recent groundbreaking studies (2007a, 2007b, 2008). These include a large article (published by *Voprosy psikhologii* divided into two parts that are preserved here) describing the entire personal archive of Lev Vygotsky. The issue concludes with the publication of two fragments of Vygotsky's personal notes from the Vygotsky Family archive, written in the 1930s, and annotated by Zavershneva. Vygotsky's notebook of 1932 as well as other related archival materials and research papers are scheduled to appear in the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* later this year.

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