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Editors' Introduction

L. S. Vygotsky was an early twentieth-century Russian psychologist whose writing exerts a significant influence on the development of social theory in the early years of the twenty-first century. The greater part of his legacy was produced in the 10 years that preceded his death in 1934. It now influences a wide range of disciplines and professions. His nondeterministic, nonreductionist account of the formation of mind provides current theoretical developments with a broadly drawn, yet very powerful sketch of the ways in which humans shape and are shaped by social, cultural, and historical conditions.

As David Bakhurst notes in Chapter 2, Vygotsky insisted that in order to understand the mature human mind, we must comprehend the processes from which it emerges. These ideas were originally forged at a time of rapid and intense social upheaval following the Russian Revolution. They were developed by a scholar who was charged with developing a state system for the education of "pedagogically neglected" children (Yaroshevsky, 1989, p. 96). This group included the homeless, of which there were a very large number. Thus, he was working at a time of profound social change (which was influenced by the Soviet adaptation of Marxist theory to social and political practice) and also working with a group of people who had profoundly different cultural experiences from "mainstream" members of society. He sought ways of intervening in the lives of these young people that would either compensate for or ameliorate their experience of marginalization. Consequently, it is, in some way, unsurprising that he should have attempted to develop a theory of social, cultural, and historical formation of the human mind.

A major element in Vygotsky's thesis, that human mind must be understood as the emergent outcome of cultural–historical processes. was the suggestion that methodology in social science was itself in need of profound transformation. He argued that history had presented social

science with a crisis formed by the failures of the methodologies of introspectionism and reflexology that predominated in early twentieth-century Europe (Vygotsky, 1997). The latter part of his short life witnessed his struggles with enduring philosophical, methodological, and conceptual issues, such as the identification of an appropriate unit of analysis.

A close reading of Vygotsky's work shows how his ideas developed and were transformed over a very brief period of time. It is difficult to reconcile some of the writing from the early 1920s with that which was produced during the last 2 years of his life. These rapid changes, coupled with the fact that his work was not published in chronological order, make synthetic summaries of his work difficult. It is our intention that this book will make Vygotsky "easier to read" by discussing his work in terms of the cultures in which it arose and developed; seek to clarify aspects of the intellectual legacy that he left; and then discuss subsequent applications of this legacy.

There is a growing interest in what has become known as "sociocultural or cultural–historical theory," and its subsequent close relative "activity theory." These traditions are historically linked to the work of L. S. Vygotsky and attempt to provide an account of learning and development as mediated processes. These traditions are, in themselves, broad theoretical frameworks, which defy complete descriptions to the satisfaction of all concerned. Vygotsky maintained a particular interest in the relationship between speaking and thinking. The mediational role of speech was brought to attention through the publication of *Thinking and Speech* which, in various guises, remains his most popular text. In some dialects of contemporary theory inspired by Vygotsky, the emphasis is on semiotic mediation with a particular emphasis on speech. In this book, cultural artifacts, such as speech, serve as tools that both shape possibilities for thought and action and, in turn, are shaped by those who use them. In other accounts, more emphasis is placed on the analysis of participation and the ways in which individuals function in communities. In activity theory, it is joint-mediated activity that takes the center stage in the analysis. This broad grouping of approaches has different strands emanating from the original differences in emphasis established by Russian writers such as Rubinshtein (1957), Uznadze (1961), Basov (1931), and Leont'ev (1972) as well as the physiologist Bernshtein (1966, 1967).

Contemporary approaches attempt to theorize and provide methodological tools for investigating the processes by which phylogenetic, social, cultural, and historical factors shape human functioning. None resort to determinism because they acknowledge that in the course of

their own development, human beings also actively shape the very forces that are active in shaping them. As Michael Cole has noted:

> The dual process of shaping and being shaped through culture implies that humans inhabit "intentional" (constituted) worlds within which the traditional dichotomies of subject and object, person and environment, and so on cannot be analytically separated and temporally ordered into independent and dependent variables. (Cole, 1996, p. 103)

This mediational model, which entails the mutual influence of individual and supraindividual factors, lies at the heart of many attempts to develop our understanding of the possibilities for interventions in human learning and development. All these arguments, along with many others drawn from Vygotsky's writing, have been influential in the development of branches of social theory. Researchers and scholars working in diverse fields, such as education, psychology, sociology, communication, philosophy, sociotechnical systems design, and business studies, draw on Vygotsky's work and its subsequent developments.

The book is made up of three sections. The first section is titled "Vygotsky in Context." In the opening paragraph of Chapter 1, Rene van der Veer applies Vygotsky's theory to the analysis of Vygotsky's own work. He suggests that to understand the work we need to be guided by Vygotsky's insight: in order to comprehend the inner mental processes of human beings, we have to step outside of the mind to look at these human beings in their sociocultural context. He cites Vygotsky's close colleague Luria who argued that:

> We should not look for the explanation of behavior in the depths of the brain or the soul but in the external living conditions of persons and most of all in the external conditions of their societal life, in their social-historical forms of existence. (Luria, 1979, p. 23)

It is this argument that drove us to open the book with these chapters. The second section, "Readings of Vygotsky," is concerned with interpretations of Vygotsky's legacy. This section allows our contributors to bring an early twenty-first century perspective to this enduring contribution. The third and final section, "Applications of Vygotsky's Work," is concerned with understandings of how the work is being applied in our current cultural historical circumstances.

VYGOTSKY IN CONTEXT

In considering the work of Lev Vygotsky in relation to its context, it is worthwhile to pause at the outset to consider the two dimensions of his

writing. It is tempting, for example, to adopt a conventional understanding of context as a synonym for environment and, in turn, to interpret environment narrowly as a set of objectively specifiable set of contemporaneous surrounding social and physical conditions. However, as van der Veer notes in Chapter 1, Vygotsky argued that the individual and the environment mutually constitute each other; "the environment" cannot be specified independently of the organism (in this case, person) who lives in and through that environment, changing it even as he (in this case, Vygotsky) interprets and acts on it. We should keep in mind that when speaking of Vygotsky in context, we are speaking of two different historical eras and multiple social milieus – the context of Russia and the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century and other parts of the world in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Each author in this volume is engaging in an act of interpretation that is constitutive of our own context as Vygotsky's life and work were constitutive of his.

We emphasize these complicating circumstances because recognition of these circumstances should help us to ward off the temptation to arrive at a single truth about the man, ideas, and events about which we write. The facts of Vygotsky's life and the truth about his work are a matter of continued research and reconsideration that are best viewed in that light. The conclusions that different authors reach vary within and across historical time as well as within and across national and disciplinary contexts.

Few authors have contributed as much to our attempts to understand Vygotsky in context than René van der Veer and his colleague Jaan Valsiner, who have written the most extensively researched monograph on this topic (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). In that volume they treat the development of Vygotsky's ideas from his early life in Byelorussia in the years preceding, accompanying, and following World War I through his move to Moscow and until his death in 1934. Drawing on a wide array of sources, they portray the life of a Jewish Russian intellectual living in tumultuous times who participated as an activist in the transformations occurring in his own country and who incorporated into his life's work an astonishing knowledge of the history of world philosophy, social theory, literature, psychology, and evolutionary biology.

In Chapter 1, van der Veer focuses on a range of contemporary Russian thinkers whose work is closely associated with psychology, although they might have identified themselves as physiologists (Pavlov) or evolutionary biologists (Severtsov). From van der Veer's account, it seems clear that from early on Vygotsky wished to create a psychology that was rooted in the tradition of the natural sciences but that reached into the laws of society, a psychology that bridged between Darwin and Marx.

As he developed his ideas through the 1920s and early 1930s, he did so in dialogue with his Russian colleagues, all of whom were wrestling the long-standing issues of how to reconcile *idealism* and *materialism,* and all of whom were required, like it or not, to do so under conditions of the growth of the Soviet state and its Marxist–Leninist ideology that resulted in the deaths of many of his colleagues.

It seems entirely fitting that van der Veer should end his account of Vygotsky in context by concluding that although "we must step outside the researcher's mind(s) and take their environment into consideration. . . . we must not forget that that environment is no absolute entity but becomes refracted in the researchers' mind(s)."

In Chapter 2, David Bakhurst forcefully requires us to attend to the uncertainties that arise when we focus on the historical nature of context and attempt to interpret a scholar's work from a different historical and sociocultural position than that in which the work was conducted. A philosopher himself, who had the opportunity to work in Moscow with several leading Soviet philosophers interested in the work of Vygotsky, Bakhurst makes clear Vygotsky's long-standing interest in, and knowledge of, the history of philosophy on which he drew repeatedly. Although Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and Engels figure prominently in Vygotsky's writings, so do philosophers ranging from the Greeks to his European and American contemporaries.

Bakhurst is particularly interested in making the argument that Vygotsky's psychological research is best interpreted within the philosophical tradition of rationalism, a belief, as he puts it, in the "priority of reason." To make his argument, he constructs a composite picture of what he terms "Vygotsky's western followers," who, in his interpretation, wish to reconstruct and improve on Vygotsky's ideas by expunging the ideas of what is considered to be their unfortunate rationalist elements (adherence to realism, scientism, universalism, Eurocentrism and progress, didacticism and individualism) – the demon's of Bakhurst's argument. He then sets out to exorcise the demons he has summoned.

Drawing on a combination of Vygotsky's own texts and the views of a number of contemporary Anglo-American and Russian philosophers, Bakhurst takes up and sets out to exorcise each of the presumed errors in Vygotsky's thinking. His examination of the issues leads to the conclusion that "contemporary philosophy . . . promises to strengthen Vygotsky's [rationalist] position." At the same time, he urges those currently interested in the relation of culture and mind to learn from Vygotsky's deep understanding of the process of mental development. Through dialogue between Vygotsky's time and our own, Bakhurst argues, deeper understanding is attainable.

In Chapter 3, Anne Edwards takes up a topic that has been much discussed by those interested in Vygotsky – the relationship of his ideas to those of his American contemporaries associated with the philosophical school of *pragmatism*. It is well known that Vygotsky read and admired the work of William James, and there has been a good deal of speculation about the relationship between Dewy and Vygotsky, but it is George Herbert Mead on whom Edwards focuses.

Edwards notes both similarities and differences in the circumstances and ideas that characterized Mead and Vygotsky's lives and work. Just as van der Veer placed Vygotsky within the social, intellectual, and historical circumstances of his time and place, Edwards places Mead in his: America in the post–Civil War era rather than in Russia in the middle of a revolution. Mead lived in America, a nation of immigrants, where individual initiative and opportunity were wellsprings of philosophy, rather than in a nation straddling Europe and Asia, where collectivism was a reigning ideology organizing social life and opportunity. Vygotsky could experience these circumstances after the revolution that occurred when he was approaching adulthood.

Given these contrasting experiences, it is fascinating to consider, as Edwards does in detail, the similarities and differences in the ways that Vygotsky and Mead sought to understand and supersede such fundamental dichotomies as self and society, consciousness and behavior, lower and higher mental processes, and metaphysics and science. Edwards' comparative analysis of the development of Mead and Vygotsky's ideas leads us back to the question of the contexts within which Mead and Vygotsky worked and are being selectively appropriated by scholars in different countries. Why, for example, do some of Vygotsky's ideas find favor in the United States but not others (a question that invites us to reconsider Bakhurst's chapter, which raises similar issues, although, appropriately enough, with somewhat different ends in mind)? How do the two scholars in question enter into and change the contexts in which they participate? (This is a question that leads us back to van der Veer's insistence on the mutual constitution of person and environment.)

There is a sense that the cultures formed within the categories by and through which academies are structured to do their own work on the shaping of artifacts such as texts. In the Chapter 4, Dorothy Holland and William Lachicotte, Jr., whose intellectual roots are to be found in anthropology, also discuss Mead in relation to Vygotsky. Here we have Vygotsky and Mead in another context. Holland and Lachicotte draw attention to the particular place of identity as a key concept in many different fields, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistic, and cultural studies. They explore this concept from the two broad

perspectives proposed by Mead and Erikson in a way that reflects the authors' own anthropological priorities. In the discussion of Mead's contribution, his emphasis on the outcomes of sociogenesis in terms of links between self and society is contrasted with Vygotsky's concern for the development of mind and personality through sociogenesis. Baldwin and Royce are introduced and discussed in terms of their influence on Vygotsky and Mead's sociogenetic accounts of self and mind. Holland and Lachiotte reiterate the fundamental importance of *mediation* for the study of identity and move to a discussion of *agency*. This leads to an examination of identity formation in trajectories of participation across activities. At the close of the chapter, they return to the central underlying tension between Erikson and Mead's theories with respect to the existence of multiple identities and the degree of integration of such identities. They question the extent to which a person may seek to maintain some level of integration of self across multiple contexts, or, at least, may be distressed by their contradictory demands. They suggest that Mead and Vygotsky share a belief in *active internalization* (self authoring), *dialogic selves* (self-other dialogues), and the semiotics of behavior. They proceed to argue that when enhanced by Vygotsky's notions of semiotic mediation, higher psychological functions, and agency, these jointly held views "constitute a powerful sociogenetic vision of how individuals come to be inhabited by, and yet co-construct, the social and cultural worlds through which they exist."

In Chapter 5, Vera John-Steiner raises, in still another form, the issues surrounding a consideration of Vygotsky in context. As she notes at the outset, Vygotsky's (1934/1962) work first came to wide attention in the United States through the publication of a book titled *Thought and Language*. In that year, the United States and the then–Soviet Union came frighteningly close to thermonuclear war; the text of Vygotsky's *Myishlenie I Rech* (published in 1934, the year of Vygotsky's death) had been purged of most of its references to Marx and Engels, as well as many of its references literary works. When it appeared again in 1987, now translated as *Thinking and Speech,* American readers were prepared to consider the possibility that perhaps the references to Marxism were not a political charade and that the poet, Osip Mandelshtam's insights ("I forgot the word I wanted to say, and thought, unembodied, returned to the hall of shadows") might be a fitting starting point for understanding the relationship of the mental and the linguistic in human nature.

John-Steiner's examines and updates the question of the relation of Vygotsky's ideas to those of his American contemporary, Benjamin Lee Whorf. In addition, she includes some of her own, fascinating work that

expands on several of Vygotsky's key ideas such as his characterization of inner speech. Interestingly, just as Vygotsky's work experienced a long period of neglect in Russia, Whorf's underwent a long period of disfavor in the West. However, albeit for different reasons related to their different sociopolitical contexts, Whorf has begun to find favor once again among contemporary scholars interested in the relationship of language and thought (Gentner and Goldin-Meadow, 2003).

The juxtaposition of these two thinkers, in conjunction with the juxtaposition of the two different renderings of the title of Vygotsky's *Myishlenie I Rech* at different historical eras, and their differing sociocultural–political contexts is especially apposite to the topic of Vygotsky in context. *Thinking and Speech* clearly adheres more faithfully to the original text in terms of content. But the change in titles also bespeaks the changing context within Russian psychology at the time and the influence of third-generatIon Vygotskian-inspired psychologists on their American colleagues. By the time *Thinking and Speech* appeared, there was a far deeper appreciation in the United States of Vygotsky's deep commitment to the idea that the human mind must be studied in *the process of becoming*, the theme with which Bakhurst ends his chapter. Fittingly, this different set of understandings is accompanied by a different way of expressing the underlying concept in words. John-Steiner makes this point emphatically by ending her chapter with Vygotsky's declaration that "the historical study of behavior is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base."

READINGS OF VYGOTSKY

At the beginning of Chapter 6, Boris Meshcheryakov reminds us of Dostoevsky's famous speech in 1880 in which he said, "Had Pushkin lived longer, there probably would be fewer discussions and misunderstandings between us than we see today. But God judged differently. Pushkin died at the peak of his powers and, undoubtedly, took some great mystery to his tomb. And now we are solving this mystery without him."

The mysteries that grew out of Vygotsky's early death do not compare with those associated with Pushkin, but Dostoevsky's comment does apply to Vygotsky. Because Vygotsky wrote so much so quickly, because he lived in a contentious and dangerous political context (see Cole and Gajdamaschko), and because he died in the middle of a brilliant career, he took some great unanswered mysteries to his tomb. This has been the source of confusion and frustration for those of us who have tried to understand Vygotsky during the last several decades, but it has also given rise to a great deal of generative debate.

The many productive readings one can make of Vygotsky stem from many sources. In our view an important starting point in this regard is that he was an "ambivalent Enlightenment rationalist" (Wertsch, 1995). In some of his writings, he seems to be deeply committed to the kind of abstract reasoning and social engineering that would be a credit to the strongest advocate of the Enlightenment. But at other points in his oeuvre he sounds like someone devoted to German Romanticism, or even mysticism. This is not simply a matter of stages in his career – the deep and abiding struggle among these grand traditions characterized his writing throughout his life.

So who was the "real" Vygotsky? In our view the only reasonable answer to this is to say he that like just about everyone in the modern West, he was a child of these two grand traditions, and his great contribution was to draw on them and others in unique ways to come up with a powerful amalgam of ideas. Instead of insisting on reading him in one or another way in isolation, however, the best way to appreciate Vygotsky is to recognize how generative this seeming contradiction has been in spawning all sorts of innovations in theory and practice.

This is not to say that we can make anything we wish out of Vygotsky's writings. Any claims about "Vygotsky said . . ." or "Vygotsky thought . . ." should be backed up by close reading, a practice that continues to be extremely rewarding in his case. However, to believe that there is a single, coherent dogma that one can derive from such reading is to miss the point in our view. In fact, Vygotsky foresaw the dangers of orthodoxy and insisted that he wished his ideas to be used, transcended, and even refuted, rather than serve as a sort of monument on which the dust of subsequent years would settle.

All this amounts to saying that one of the most important things that Vygotsky scholars can do is read his writings carefully and repeatedly – each time with a fresh eye. Given the richness and range of his thought, such readings are likely to yield continuing insight and inspiration, and the chapters by Meshcheryakov, Zinchenko, Cole and Gajdamaschko, del Rioand Alvarez, and Hedegaard offer a great deal of food for thought in this regard. These chapters differ in their focus and conclusions, but this is more a matter of complement than contradiction. The authors have used the lenses of various theoretical traditions to guide their interpretation, and they focus primarily on Vygotsky's own writings. In each case there is something new to learn.

In Chapter 6, which focuses most on Vygotsky's writings, Boris Meshcheryakov outlines a systemic, conceptual framework for gaining an overview of Vygotsky's writings (all 274 titles!). He does this with the help of "Logico-Semantic Analysis" (LSA). Meshcheryakov provides

a major service – and insight into Vygotsky's thinking, a task made all the more challenging because the influences on this thinking range "from the philosophy of Spinoza and Marx to the American behaviorism of Watson and the linguistics of Sapir" (see Chapter 6, this volume).

Meshcheryakov's analysis reveals a couple of general, underlying tendencies. The first is that "Vygotsky sought to present mental development on several conceptual 'screens,' each corresponding to a particular domain of development: biological phylogenesis, sociocultural 'phylogenesis,' ontogenesis (both normal and abnormal), microgenesis ('actual genesis'), and pathogenesis" (see Chapter 6, this volume).

The second tendency Meshcheryakov identifies is the role of "systematicity" in Vygotsky's writings, a tendency noted by other authors in this volume as well. Vygotsky's discussions of functional systems, the structure of functions, interfunctional connections, and functional development all reflect an analytic stance concerned with this issue. For example, in reviewing Vygotsky's account of interiorization, Meshcheryakov notes that the key to understanding this construct is the systemic structure of consciousness, rather than some kind of relocation of processes from an external to an internal plane.

Meshcheryakov also touches on the issue of systematicity is in his summary, where he identifies issues that remain open, and he also compares Vygotsky's account of developmental stages with that of Piaget. He readily admits that he is not certain how many stages should be included in an account of Vygotsky's position, but he is clear on the nature of these stages. Instead of representing a "modular" approach, Vygotsky's account is shown to involve a "multi-lineal process," and the only way to create coherence out of this "rather odd and undifferentiated mix" of components is to recognize their contribution to a systemic approach to human consciousness.

In Chapter 9, Vladimir Petrovich Zinchenko generates another perspective on Vygotsky by reading him through the lens of the Russian philologist and philosopher Gustav Shpet (1879–1937). Vygotsky studied with Shpet and was deeply influenced by him, yet as Zinchenko points out, "Vygotsky and his whole scientific school (Aleksandr R. Luria, A. N. Leont'ev, Aleksandr V. Zaporozhets, and others) ignored Shpet's works." He notes several possible motivations for this, including the political forces of repression aimed at Shpet, forces that eventually resulted in his imprisonment and brutal torture and execution. But as Zinchenko and Wertsch (in press) have outlined, there is little doubt that Vygotsky's debt to Shpet was profound, especially when it came to *inner speech*.

Interpreting the relationship between Vygotsky and Shpet, Zinchenko goes well beyond documenting that the latter indeed did influence the