

## From *Unter den Linden*, with Love: A Transnational History of Russian Psychology in East Germany<sup>1</sup>

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### Lessons from Russian Psychology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Looking back at my paper of 1996<sup>2</sup>, written in the wake of *glasnost* and the fall of the Berlin Wall, I am struck by a phrase Jaan Valsiner (1996)<sup>3</sup> used in his chapter “Social Utopias and Knowledge Construction in Psychology,” where he averred that behaviorism, cognitivism, and Marxist psychologies each showed partisanship in science. “In the case of Russian psychology,” noted Valsiner, “it is possible to trace the origins of the various “activity” theories to social ideologies underlying the child study movement (pedology) and the frequently voiced need to improve socialist construction practices” (p. 76). This illuminated my observations in the chapter below. Activity theory was not particularly progressive, but it supported a dominant agenda for educational reform. It ignored, however, genetic epistemology (Piaget) and—despite numerous declarations of the indebtedness to Vygotsky and the alleged continuity and development of his ideas in the work of the Soviet nomenclature “activity theorists”—the cultural-historical school (Vygotsky).

I encountered the ironic and counter-intuitive situation in the German Democratic Republic that Soviet psychology may have been regarded in part by some psychologists as a strait jacket, and by others as a guiding source of inspiration. Similarly in the Federal Republic of Germany,

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<sup>1</sup> *Editor’s comment:* “*Unter den Linden*” is the name of perhaps the most well-known street in Berlin and one of its main tourist attractions. The street also left its trace in the history of psychology, for instance, as the regular meeting place of the group of young scholars associated with Kurt Lewin and typically affiliated with the Berlin Institute of Psychology, who frequented one or another local coffee shop. Thus, the discovery of the renowned “Zeigarnik effect” of superior remembering unfinished actions—as opposed to finished actions—was reportedly made on the premises of one of these coffee shops at *Unter den Linden*. Yet, the title is ambiguous and this ambiguity seems to be deliberate: 63-65 *Unter den Linden* is the address of the former Soviet Embassy in Germany (nowadays—the Embassy of Russian Federation), located relatively close to the Brandenburg Gate, the former state border between the German Democratic Republic and the West Berlin, and the checkpoint that was briefly opened in August 1961 and closed down the next day for several decades thereafter. The ambiguity of the title is further increased by the allusion to one of the most famous “spy novels” of the Cold War period: “From Russia, with Love”, the fifth novel in Ian Fleming’s James Bond series, first published in the UK in 1957.—A. Yasnitsky.

<sup>2</sup> See the second part of this publication that follows under the header “The Reflection of Soviet Psychology in East German Psychological Practice”. This text was originally composed in 1996, but it still seems to be of certain interest to contemporary readers in North America, Russia, the united Germany, and, quite possibly, in other regions and countries where the so-called “Russian psychology” is on the rise.

<sup>3</sup> See Valsiner, J. (1996). Social utopias and knowledge construction in psychology. In V. A. Koltsova, Y. N. Oleinik, A. R. Gilgen & C. K. Gilgen (Eds.), *Post-Soviet perspectives on Russian psychology* (pp.,70-84). Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press.

Marxism was anathema in psychology for most psychologists during the Cold War, yet the Marxist school in West Berlin led by Klaus Holzkamp deployed Marxism as a revolutionary force and allied with the Student Revolution there in the 1970s<sup>4</sup>. What it came down to was specific methodological preferences. Vygotsky and the psychology of play, or symbolic processes, simply did not take hold before 1990, in part because of the ideological preferences of the educational establishment in Germany, East and West alike. They were in the grips of a Dewey-like instrumentalism, “children learn to do by doing.”

In the Italian case, Luciano Mecacci (2012) has shown something similar:

During the first decades after WWII, in 1950s and 1960s, the leftist intellectuals in Italy played the leading role in the international dissemination of Soviet research, primarily in the institutional and publishing spheres (i.e., printing houses and journals) affiliated with the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI*). This was the institutional channel that brought into Italy not only oeuvre of the classics of Marxism-Leninism and official political publications that were coming out in the Soviet Union, but also Soviet scientific works... Therefore, for Italian psychology and psychiatry the theories developed in Russia and Soviet Union never were just a model that was to be transferred into Italy on the basis of its novelty and scientific merit. Analysis of the ways how and when these models were imported and spread in Italy reveals similarity of the patterns of their parallel development in Italy, that is, how considerably they were influenced by the concerns of ideological and political nature<sup>5</sup>.

Elsewhere else Mecacci also shows how Vygotsky’s “Thought and Speech” (*Myshlenie i rech’*, originally published after the author’s death, in 1934) was republished in Soviet Union under the editorship of Vygotsky’s self-proclaimed followers and, at the same time, notably censored in part in 1956, then yet again republished and even further censored in 1982. For a virtually full list of all later alteration of Vygotsky’s text of 1934 in its subsequent republications see recent textological work by Mecacci and Yasnitsky, 2011<sup>6</sup>. All these—often politically motivated—processes within Soviet scientific establishment deeply affected the quality of the texts of Soviet psychologists that were “exported” from behind the Iron Curtain and translated into Western languages. For discussion of “Vygotsky in English” and “what needs to be done,” see van der

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the history of Holzkamp’s group see, e.g., Teo, Thomas (1998) Klaus Holzkamp and the rise and decline of German Critical Psychology. *History of Psychology* 1(3):pp. 235-253, available online at <http://htpprints.yorku.ca/archive/00000183/>

<sup>5</sup> See Mecacci, L. (2012). Russian psychology and Italian psychology and psychiatry in the second half of 20 century. *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 5(3), 81-871; available online: <http://psyanima.psy-dubna.ru/journal/2012/3/2012n3a4/2012n3a4.2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See Mecacci, L., & Yasnitsky, A. (2011). Editorial Changes in the Three Russian Editions of Vygotsky’s Thinking and Speech (1934, 1956, 1982): Towards Authoritative and Ultimate English Translation of the Book. *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 4(4), 159-187; available online at <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2011/4/2011n4a5/2011n4a5.pdf>

Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011<sup>7</sup>. Subsequently, these “losses in translation” had notable impact on the reception and are partly the reason for the major distortions of Soviet scholarship that have been discussed recently under the banner of the “revisionist revolution” (for instance, in “Vygotskian science”, see Yasnitsky, 2012)<sup>8</sup>. Someone should compare the German translations—and, for that matter, the history of the reception of Soviet psychological ideas in Germany—for similar ideological footprints. I cannot readily do it, as my East German book collection now resides at the Núcleo de História e Filosofia da Psicologia of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora in Brazil! During the Cold War, then, Vygotsky and more generally, cultural approaches languished in the Soviet bloc. Then after 1990, Russian historical scholarship on Vygotsky drew upon rich Russian sources, as it found its way into developmental and cross-cultural research. Meanwhile, thanks to the English translation, however misguided and erroneous as it reportedly is, Vygotsky-inspired developmental psychology flourished in North America under the highly eclectic umbrella term of “cultural-historical activity theory”. This phrase—like many other clichés of the self-nominated “post-Vygotskian” scholarship (see Keiler, 2012)<sup>9</sup>—actually never occurs in Vygotsky’s original writings, for obvious reasons. Thus one needs to break down monolithic terms like “Vygotskian”, “Marxist psychology” or “Russian psychology” into schools and journals and research programs<sup>10</sup>.

This old paper, and the other chapters that it appeared with, can inspire us to perform another update on the reception of national psychology, just as the trajectories of behaviorism or cognitivism need sharpening in the U.S. context. Such scrutiny may lead us to become aware of ideological underpinnings and social concerns of the time. Science is not always universal knowledge, since it clearly has cultural origins. The Enlightenment provided utopian ideals of reason, but current feminist and postcolonial scholarship seeks a deeper level of “reason” in the recognition of power structures underpinning science. Emancipation can come through capacity-

<sup>7</sup> See van der Veer, R. & Yasnitsky, A. (2011). Vygotsky in English: What still needs to be done. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 45(4), 475-493; open access full text available online at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12124-011-9172-9>

<sup>8</sup> See Yasnitsky, A. (2012). Revisionist Revolution in Vygotskian Science: Toward Cultural-Historical Gestalt Psychology. Guest Editor's Introduction. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 50(4), 3-15; text available online: [http://individual.utoronto.ca/yasnitsky/texts/Yasnitsky%20\(2012\).%20Revisionist\\_revolution.pdf](http://individual.utoronto.ca/yasnitsky/texts/Yasnitsky%20(2012).%20Revisionist_revolution.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> For textological and historical analysis of phrases totally alien to Vygotsky’s discourse, but commonly ascribed to Vygotsky by his critics and self-proclaimed followers and “brethren in arms” see Keiler, P. (2012). “Cultural-historical theory” and “Cultural-historical school”: from myth (back) to reality. *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 5(1), 1-33; available online: <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2012/1/2012n1a1/2012n1a1.1.pdf>. For other, somewhat shortened versions of this text in Russian, German, and Portuguese see open access materials of the special issue of the journal online at <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2012/1/index.php>

<sup>10</sup> See Timothy Lenoir (1997), *Instituting science. The cultural production of scientific disciplines*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (2010), *On historicizing epistemology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

building of marginalized communities, following on the innovative “quality of life” approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum<sup>11</sup>.

If I were looking at Marxist psychology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I would pursue an angle suggested by Friedrich Engels to expose the externalities of capitalist production. A truly progressive psychology would examine the impact of global capitalism on the environment, on the workers and the poor, bringing to bear the perspective of social justice. As Engels wrote in *Dialectics of Nature*:

All hitherto existing modes of production have aimed merely at achieving the most immediately and directly useful effect of labour. The further consequences, which appear only later and become effective through gradual repetition and accumulation, were totally neglected<sup>12</sup>.

Surely psychology has a role in the “social effects of our productive activity,” and this role remains too little understood to date<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> See Woodward, W. R. & Barbour, Lauren (2009). Beyond universalism: Capabilities approach for improving women’s quality of life. *Human Ontogenetics*, 3, 75-81; Sen, A. 1992. Inequality reexamined. Oxford University Press, Oxford; Nussbaum, M. & Sen, A. (ed.) 1993. The quality of life. N.Y., Oxford; Nussbaum, M. 2000. Women and human development. The capabilities approach. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

<sup>12</sup> See text online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/>

<sup>13</sup> For a related discussions see, e.g., <https://www.facebook.com/events/530605570339670/> —May 20, 2013

## **The Reflection of Soviet Psychology in East German Psychological Practice<sup>14</sup>**

Soviet pedagogy was, and remains, for teachers of the German Democratic Republic, a source of knowledge that cannot be closed. (Margot Honecker, in Drefenstedt, 1975, p. 7)

These words from the German Democratic Republic's (GDR's) minister of education should not be taken at face value. One needs to know that the author directed secondary education for decades in East Germany. She is the wife of Erich Honecker, the longtime minister-president. The Honeckers represented a politburo of octogenarians who had experienced World War II as victims of Nazi totalitarianism and who emerged as Communist leaders with a Utopian vision in the 1950s. They set the Soviet-oriented tone for social change and the implementation of psychological practices in a new totalitarian state. The East German national identity that they represented was not democratic, despite its name; it involved ideologies with hegemonic and hierarchical assumptions about social relations and institutional realities (Schiller, 1993).

Why is East Germany of interest in a volume on post-Soviet psychology? Clearly, Germany represents a satellite state in the period 1945 to 1990. Moreover, it was the powerhouse—not only economically but psychologically. Ideas flowed from the Soviet Union into Germany, but as is less well known in the West, ideas also flowed from Germany back into the Soviet Union. The ongoing historical relationship between these two former military giants sets the overall context here. The Soviets feared and despised the Germans for the brutal invasions of World War II, yet they sought before and after that war to emulate German and European culture and science.

As we shall demonstrate, East German psychologists also remained closely attuned to selected trends in the West German and North American literature throughout the Communist period (Woodward, 1985). They paid lip service to the Soviet opinion leaders, and they forewent entire topic areas deemed "bourgeois." But they lacked contact with many important Western traditions, and they fell seriously behind in the expertise and equipment to keep up with psychology worldwide.

### **Unification Year Changes in East German Public Education**

A feature of East German education, like that in the Soviet Union and even West Germany, was central planning. Textbooks, for instance, came from the Ministry of Education in the respective states or, in the East German case, from the Ministry of Education in the capital,

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<sup>14</sup> The reader is reminded that the text in this section was originally written in 1990s, and thus some traces of the "perestroika" discourse might be notable in the text.

Berlin. The sea change in ideologies could not have been starker for students and teachers when the Berlin Wall fell in 1990. As German unification began that year, a West German Adenauer-Schmidt-Kohl worldview replaced the worldview of Marx and Lenin. The influence of the Soviet Union fell overnight. Few complained initially; rather, a sense of elation, relief, and expectation set in. The Utopian Soviet social experiment had failed; the West promised something better.

The educational system's psychological supports began to unravel in 1990. Since I (the senior author) and family lived in East Berlin during 1990-1991, I will draw initially from our educational experiences during this transitional year. My wife taught English to nuclear engineers for a private English-language school. Our three children had a choice of schools, quite unlike the neighborhood school concept in the United States. The nine-year-old attended a "diplomat school" with international classmates devoted largely to rote learning of German. The twelve-year-old went to a local middle school, while the fourteen-year-old took a train to the Kennedy School, a German public high school in West Berlin.

Our children experienced an "exotization syndrome" in East Berlin with questions like, "Do you come from Hollywood?" But they received no multicultural education. Why had neither German communism nor the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) found ways to counsel international students? In reality, Germans on both sides of the former Wall ignored cultural difference and expected foreigners to learn German and conform to a monocultural society. The monolith that was Marxism-Leninism leveled cultures and replaced them with a "scientific worldview of dialectical materialism" in a "worker state." The study of ethnic minorities and cross-cultural psychology had no theoretical place in this system of psychological knowledge, leaving pupils poorly equipped for the crisis of national identities to come.

Schoolchildren and teachers in East Berlin experienced the initial phase of the unification with mixed emotions. From a critical East German perspective, West Germans were culturally colonizing them. From a pro-West perspective, the West was emancipating the East from a totalitarian regime. Social studies, history, and German textbooks arrived free from the Federal Republic of Germany, soon followed by science and mathematics fare. Teachers initially welcomed the flashy new books. These scientific and cultural supports seemed at first like heaven on earth. Soon, though, teachers found themselves on a lower pay scale or without a job, while pupils were unsettled by finding themselves demoted to a lower grade.

### **The Transfer of Soviet Psychology into East German Education**

I have intentionally waxed personal in order to show the surface impressions of an American family in East Berlin during the unification year. Unification meant a break with a Communist past, the shedding of one cultural identity in East Germany for a new one.

The East German psychological literature offers an altogether different window into what was the norm or at least the official credo under communism. So-called dialectical materialist



principles of education, for example, do not represent actual practice. Classroom practices, like investigative practice, and the literature that informed them, have deeper roots.

The transfer of Soviet psychological knowledge to Germany took off in the 1960s. At the International Congress of Psychology in 1980, Congress host and president-elect of the 1984 International Congress Adolf Kossakowsky (1980) cited Rubinstein (1962a, 1963), Leontiev (1975), and Elkonin (1963) as "key Soviet publications" (p. 130). The Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the GDR published important Russian essays on pedagogy in translation (Drefenstedt, 1975). German translation of Soviet pedagogy and psychology books was in full swing by the 1970s.

One might have expected to find the rivalry between the Soviet psychological schools of Sergei Rubinstein and Alexei Leontiev (Kozulin, 1984, p. 38) preserved in Germany. When Rubinstein was denounced in the 1940s, Leontiev's adherents are said to have taken advantage (p. 25). Yet both became known in East Germany about the same time in the 1950s through the 1970s. Although Leontiev's *Problems of the Development of Mind* appeared in 1959 (1975), the focus remained on Rubinstein. East Germans seem to have had an intellectual affinity with him, thanks to his generous citing of their authors. They clearly repudiated the "witch hunt" against him in the 1940s; they agreed with the post-Stalin thaw that accepted him again. For example, Drefenstedt drew from Rubinstein's *Foundations of General Psychology* (1940/1958a) and *Being and Consciousness* (1962b). Rubinstein, it appeared, had become by the mid-1970s the standard bearer of psychology for educational theorists.

The tastes of the East Germans in educational psychology are revealing. Rubinstein represents one of several examples of what Kozulin (1984) termed a "rigid scholastic curriculum" (p. 146; cf. Rahmani, 1973, pp. 260-286). The Germans were distinctly out of phase with the Russians, for whom Rubinstein had been important in the 1940s and eclipsed in the 1950s. For the East Germans, Rubinstein (1889-1960) became the dominant voice, following Piotr Galperin of the Kharkov School in the 1960s and Lidia Bozhovich in the 1970s. Not until later would the predecessor of all these men, Lev Vygotsky, appear in the German literature (e.g., Vygotsky, 1985).

## **Two features of Soviet Psychology Applied Education**

One sees here in the 1960s and 1970s a rapid expansion of a Soviet educational psychology in East Germany, emphasizing "working conditions" [*Arbeitsanforderungen, Arbeitsbedingungen*], "psychological technology" [*Psychotechnik*], and "problem solving" [*Problemlosen*] (Claus et al., 1985). These practical emphases came to the German Democratic Republic through translation, guest lectures, and scientific exchange. They showed up in our son's eighth grade in the one day a week devoted to work in a streetcar repair facility. They also reflected the obligatory training of teachers and other professionals in a manual vocation.

A second feature involved a preference for Gesell-like qualitative observation in naturalistic settings. Anna Ljublinskaya's *Child Psychology* (1971) went through five German editions by 1985, drawing on five decades of Soviet scholarship. She preferred naturalistic

experiments in the school, especially with preschool through seven years of age. She and her coworkers awakened children's interest in pets, for example, by amplifying a hands-on experience with information from books (p. 464). Relationships to teachers, parents, and peers became the basis for emotional ties later on; children increasingly oriented to general rules of behavior during this age (p. 468). In playing jokes on one another and on adults, children learn to take initiative and to relate to others (p. 478).

Conspicuously missing from these Soviet-styled German educational texts was any hint of the normal curve depicting the range of abilities in schoolchildren. It is as if the testing movement had passed the Soviet Union by (Brozek, 1972). No wonder that such dated classroom experiments and theory were brushed aside in the 1990s. Their largely Russian bibliographies and their rambling style made them obsolete.

### **The Absense of Cultural-Historical Concern**

A Rumanian-born Israeli, Levi Rahmani (1973), did not even include a chapter on social psychology or cross-cultural psychology in his history of Soviet psychology. In his final chapter, he found three reasons for the lack of even a Soviet psychology of personality (p. 347): an analytic bent, ignoring the whole person; a preference for biological explanations; and the assumption that the classics of Marxism cover the social aspects.

Here was the underside of Soviet-style communism; despite emphasis on a new world order and an international working-class movement, East German psychology remained profoundly monocultural, nationalistic, and ethnocentric in each of its cultural settings. Race, culture, and ethnocentrism are missing from the index of Hans Hiebsch and Manfred Vorwerg's, *Sozialpsychologie* (1980). Psychology infrequently addressed the challenge of race or even culture. This resulted in part from an ideology that preached uniform laws of history without respect to cultural uniqueness (Brozek, 1974). Such uniformitarianism resulted from the 1917 revolution in which one political group stamped out the opposition, and it helps to explain the arbitrary domination of the reflexology of Pavlov and Bekhterev (Joravsky, 1989).

Several aspects of social psychology received a boost from unification. As the influx of East Europeans threatened to take jobs and replace the East German culture with new values, "migration" became a topic. Migration also brought awareness of the ethnic groups in East Germany, such as Russians, Chinese, Cubans, North Vietnamese, and Africans of various nationalities. The Communist coalition had attracted students and professionals from many lands. Little literature existed on the counseling of minorities, school adjustment, and biracial marriage; clinical personality psychology was built up in the 1970s and forbidden in the 1980s (Wolf, 1992, pp. 8-9).

### **The Rubinstein Phenomenon**

Prominent in broad areas of psychology was the Soviet activity theory of Sergei Rubinstein. Rubinstein opposed the idea of a "Soviet man" and drew from international sources



for his psychology. In a 1945 article, "Philosophy and Psychology"—published in the Polish journal *Voprossy Filosofiy* and reprinted in Rubinstein's book (1979)—he cited B. Russell, G. H. Mead, J. Dewey, J. B. Watson, E. L. Thorndike, K. Lashley, and C. Morris, as well as Wundt, James, and Freud. He had risen to prominence in the mid-1930s to mid-1950s, after winning the 1941 Stalin Prize for his *Foundations of General Psychology* (1940/1958a; cf. Payne, 1968). He combined a philosophical background under neo-Kantians Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp with a developmental approach to consciousness. He opposed the use of standardized tests in World War II on grounds that higher mental processes were not accessible to them. With Luria, he invoked interactive instruction as the path to understanding the mind (Valsiner, 1988, pp. 104-110).

Following World War II, the cold war brought a fortress mentality. Rubinstein lost favor in the Soviet Union, in part because of his internationalism; he was, after all, a Russian Jew educated in Germany. Parteinost, or party thinking, rejected Leontiev as well on grounds of "social purification." As a result, hardliners reintroduced Pavlov and Bekhterev. Thus, in its typical style, the Academy of Science and Medicine of the USSR determined in 1950 that Pavlov's was the acceptable neurophysiology; his criticisms of Gestalt and Sherrington's integrative action, and his endorsement of Lenin's view of consciousness as an outgrowth of matter, made him popular again. Pavlov's disciple A. Ivanov-Smolensyii won the Stalin Prize with *Essays on the Pathophysiology of the Higher Nervous Activity* in 1954 (Valsiner, 1988, pp. 110-115).

As mentioned above, Rubinstein emerged in East Germany soon after his fall from favor in the Soviet Union. (We find him cited only twice [pp. 38, 168] in nine Russian articles from 1970 to 1973 translated in Drefenstedt [1975].) It is hardly surprising that Germans would choose to translate someone educated in their own philosophical tradition, whom they could understand in his neo-Kantian philosophical presuppositions. Rubinstein offered legitimation for German educators in the 1960s as they began in earnest to appropriate Soviet thought or to seek Soviet sanction for German thought following the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. By 1979, on the eve of the International Congress of Psychology in Leipzig, Adolf Kossakowsky issued a glowing foreword and elaborate notes to the reprint of Rubinstein's *Problems of General Psychology* (Kossakowsky, 1979, pp. 7-11). This volume included Rubinstein's 1934 essay on psychology and Karl Marx (pp. 11-32), his 1939 paper on the philosophical roots of experimental psychology (pp. 50-90), his essays on Ivan Sechenov, Ivan Pavlov, and the problem of personality from the 1950s (pp. 193-201), and his 1959 article on the philosophical foundations of psychology in Marx (pp. 33-49).

From the point of view of investigative practice, however, Rubinstein's essay "The Psychology of Language" in 1941 is illuminating; he followed Piaget and Vygotsky in his introduction to the empirical papers of members of the A. I. Herzen Institute in Leningrad. Language, Rubinstein wrote in 1941, has two functions: (1) communication with others and (2) semantics (1979, pp. 207-209). Immediately following this language article, the Germans invaded and blockaded Leningrad, years of starvation ensued, and Rubinstein's collaborators dispersed; not until 1953 would Rubinstein be able to reassemble them. In 1969, he supervised

the experiments of a half-dozen co-workers; prominent among them were A. M. Leuschina's studies of "situational speech." She found a high proportion of preschool speech relating to the circumstances, depending on how well one knows the speech partner. Such data at the level of descriptive statistics in Rubinstein's essays did not seem to bother German psychologists.

But was Rubinstein really at the forefront? Certainly not in terms of laboratory findings. At best, he remained the leading textbook writer. Clearly his theoretical eclecticism and wide reading, especially in German, allowed him to carry the day in East Germany right up to the 1990s. (The Klix anthology [1980] cites his four books [1958, 1962, 1963, 1979] and two articles [1948-1949, 1958]; it only cites Leontiev's Problems [1964] and the German translation of his early essay on Marx [1969].) Rubinstein was a pioneer in a kind of early Piagetian observation and notation of children's language in conversation with adults; he fell short of any rigorous experimental method.

### **A.N. Leontiev's Investigative Practices for Studying Reflection and Activity**

Trained under Vygotsky, Alexei N. Leontiev became the leader of the Kharkov School (then the capital of the Ukraine) in the 1930s, known for his "activity theory" (Valsiner, 1988, pp. 217-219). By 1975, thanks to a German translation of his collection of essays called "Problems of the Development of Mind" (1975/1959), the East German reader had a rather complete overview of the origin of the theory. It begins with Leontiev's second dissertation (Habilitationarbeit) "On the Development of the Mental" in 1940. Here he had presented his claim that persons and their environments, both physical and social, are connected in activity through an immediate relation called "reflection" (p. 110). Leontiev criticized the signal function of sensibility in Pavlov's conditioned reflex (p. 113), arguing that sensibility had a specific objective function not limited to conscious sensation (p. 114).

Europeans still largely employed individual subjects in this period, while North Americans were introducing group subject designs by the 1920s (Danziger, 1990). Thus, one would expect Leontiev's early work on reflection to resemble the German single-subject designs, using a high-status professor as subject. Quite the opposite was the case. It turns out that Leontiev began his career with a group statistical design. He cited (1975) his research on memory in learning-disabled children (1928), which he had expanded in *On the Development of Memory* (1931). Using 1,200 subjects, he had a group of student experimenters present ten nonsense syllables, then fifteen words, and finally the words with twenty pictures to serve as mnemonics. The dependent measure composed the number of words correctly remembered; subjects also told why they chose a certain picture and how it helped to recall a word. This constituted "reflection." Data appeared in tables with group (elementary school pupils, special education pupils, physically impaired pupils) and five age levels (4-5, 6-7, 10-14, 12-16, 22-28). Leontiev listed the arithmetic mean of the values of second and third series and the coefficient of relative achievement (1975, p. 267). He concluded that "the use of pictures led in normal children to an extremely high effect on learning; in the other groups, by contrast, the effect was

much weaker or fully opposite" (p. 268). He explained the effect by "the development of mediate mental acts," that is, using the picture as an instrument of reflection.

From reflection came his activity theory—namely, that the brain is programmed to decode with the help of peripheral muscular and nervous reactions (p. 127). This theorizing remained in the classical Wundtian single-subject tradition in which the professor became the sole subject with high status. In addition to his group data, Leontiev cited experiments with tones that revealed how, after a period of one or more seconds, the subject was able to reproduce a stimulus tone (pp. 124-125). Leontiev called this the "reflecting function" (*wiederspiegelnde Funktion*) of cognition. He invoked German views of evolution including Wolfgang Köhler's work with apes using a stick to reach a goal behind a metal fence (p. 151). He illustrated with the hermit crab and the chicken how no real reflection occurs in instinctive acts.

Humans require another kind of mental development: historical developmental laws. The tool, according to Karl Marx, offered the rational means to go beyond animal instinct; it expressed a human relation of activity to object. Tools develop through work, a key concept in dialectical materialism because of its relation to alienation. Work for others can be alienating if the profit is not distributed justly. Accompanying tools and work is language, not just as a means but as a means inseparable from the "material means of production" (p. 176).

Here is a case of how this theoretical framework influences Leontiev's interpretation of American experiments. He reports that Edward Thorndike asked subjects how much they would pay in dollars to cut off a hand, to eat a quarter pound of cooked human flesh, or to spit on a picture of their mother (p. 202). With these examples, Leontiev sought to show "alienated work." He thought bourgeois psychologists failed to realize the importance of the alienation of the worker. Even though he evidently appropriated group methods from Thorndike's mental testing tradition, he criticized them for their naivete about the socioeconomic factors underlying his results. The law of effect and the law of continuity fall far short of describing human experience. Thus, American psychologists ignore a basic contradiction underlying capitalist society (p. 205).

Leontiev worked within three paradigms. As early as 1928, he adopted a design employing group differences in the experimental condition, modeled on Thorndike (1928). He also clearly voiced the socioeconomic theory of Karl Marx (1969). In addition, Leontiev and his German conferees worked within a third paradigm of activity and its reflection through language. This tradition is comparable to genetic epistemology and the Bühlers' studies of children's language. He wrote that the category mistake was to regard humans as mere organisms, which leads to "pragmatism" because it neglects the peculiarity of consciousness (1975, p. 218). Leontiev valued the work of Piaget for depicting intellectual life in direct relation to social life (p. 219). He also referred to Vygotsky for the way thought changes structure, beyond mere changes in the reflected content. This suggested an "interpsychic" process involving action and signal (p. 222). Here Leontiev had recognized social behavior: Human beings respond to one another, to the world, and to the tools they use. They may employ verbal concepts or signs to link all of these. The fundamental mechanism of mental development is the appropriation of socially-elaborated forms of activity. In this way, Leontiev esteemed and developed the "historical-cultural component" in Vygotsky, citing his work in Russian in 1956, since it

remained unpublished until then (p. 223). The Germans translated Vygotsky soon after (1964, 1985).

Why did the Germans bother to translate Leontiev's 1959 classic in 1975? Leontiev drew the concept of "societal-historical experience" primarily from Karl Marx. Marx focused on the chief activity of humans, work. Any psychology that ignores human work "cannot be a real discipline with content" (Leontiev, 1975, p. 231). The most important goal became reproducing the abilities formed into the social-historical process of evolution, specifically by putting aside private property and exposing the antagonistic relations that create conditions for history to overcome (p. 236). Obviously, Leontiev did not address the privileged position of men over women (Lapidus, 1978) or of the psychologist in society (Leontiev became head of the Psychology Department at Moscow State University), or the elevated status of Communist Party members. Nor did the German males acknowledge the tensions of officialdom and gender in their society. Women writers in East Germany, however, did begin to expose the inequities in the supposedly class society, and the fact that they were allowed to do so is remarkable (Lukens & Rosenberg, 1993).

### **The Late Arrival of Statistical Methods in East Germany**

Not until the 1980s did the first solid book on experimental methodology appear in the German Democratic Republic. The work of Lothar and Helga Sprung, *Foundations of the Methodologies and Techniques of Psychology* (1984), was not what a North American might expect. It was not a statistics textbook but a methodology text. It covered definition, law, causality, and principles of verification and induction drawn primarily from the international philosophy of science literature (e.g., Thomas Kuhn's paradigm concept, Karl Popper's book on objective knowledge, p. 37). Interestingly, it cited largely Western sources; the Soviet sources seem perfunctory. Significance tests appeared in a chapter on "the construction of the structure of psychological investigations" (pp. 288-289), and inferential statistics is later summed up briefly in terms of the null hypothesis and confidence intervals (pp. 330-331). The authors ingeniously incorporated the experimenter effects literature under the "dialectic of subject and object" (pp. 109-122).

In L. Sprung's subsequent co-authored book, *Mental Diagnosis* (Guthke, Böttcher, & Sprung, 1990), psychologists like Boris Ananiev and Lev Vygotsky received mention but no mathematical psychologists from the Soviet Union (p. 52). This book on mental testing serves as an index of progress in the acceptance of quantitative methods by 1990—the manuscript was sent in by 1986 (p. 15), but it did not appear until the political thaw in 1990. An oral tradition thus kept students current, even as a published one lagged far behind. Kozulin described the Soviet case (1984, p. 113), where manuscripts were passed around in secret, while certain scientific methods remained censored on ideological grounds.

Students of psychology in the 1990s in the satellite countries, as well as the former Soviet Union, would do well to keep an eye fixed on investigative practice. Most likely, they will follow West German, Polish, and Hungarian, in addition to, North American examples and

quickly learn multivariate methods and computer programs. For this reason, if no other, East Germans will need to retrain in the West-or yield their professional places to those trained in the state of the art. What looks to them like scientific colonization seems to the West German like emancipation from totalitarian control. The truth appears simpler from afar: a mere shift of scientific paradigms.

### **Developmental Psychology Fails to Respond to Social Needs**

Hans Dieter Schmidt defined the field of developmental psychology in his *Allgemeine Entwicklungspsychologie* [General Developmental Psychology] in 1978. To the Western eye, the book has a strong sociobiological slant-an irony within a radically environmentalist social philosophy like Marxism. Phylogeny enters in part II, while part III discusses alternative models-regulated equilibrium, rule giving, posing and solving problems, and socialization. Terman receives only one citation. Konrad Lorenz and Nicolas Tinbergen receive over twenty citations. Race is briefly discussed, but in the biological rather than the social context (pp. 204, 206, 254, 268). Ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny became the theme of the book. Absent from this picture are the classical emphases in Darwinism about the importance of the environment. A host of older sources, for example, Schneirla, Kuo, and Fantz, receive mention. Ethology became one model, cybernetic loops another (pp. 224-230). A geometric function is found (p. 323), along with sequential rules, and learning curves. "Endogenesis" theories of maturation prove useless, the author claims: hence, the reader is urged to embrace dialectic ones.

Largely absent from Schmidt's book, in any case, are applications to children. American developmental psychology would mention day care in relation to nature versus nurture, or gender role differentiation in the school and family. No such topics appear in the East German book, where, despite state-supported day care, developmental psychologists overlooked it. Since 1990, though, great practical changes have been under way. One center in Berlin follows a new Italian model of day care, the Reggio Emilia program in which parents play an active role (Woodward & Kalinowski, 1992).

### **Social Psychology Orients to State Defined Social Needs**

Social psychology, like developmental, was defined by just one book, *Social Psychology* by Hans Hiebsch and Manfred Vorweg (1980). It treated sociometry, attitude formation, leadership of all kinds, self-concept, "other" concept, and interpersonal communication-in short, all topics developed in the United States. Planning of a socialist society received emphasis, entailing leadership and attitude studies. The authors covered two-way analysis of variance, drawing on the standard West German source (Lienert, 1961). They even discussed multivariate statistics (pp. 339-379) and mathematical modeling (pp. 379-424) at generous length. But did they or others use these techniques in their research? No. The articles cited are evenly distributed from East and West Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union-a novel and international mix of sources by North American standards.



The authors of this leading social psychology book had a reputation for reconciling Marx with Western psychology. They recalled K. Kornilov's claim that the mental is a direct reflection of social conditions and Rubinstein's comment that social psychology is "the beloved heart of reactionaries" (p. 35). They followed E. S. Kusmin's *Social Psychology of Personality in Russian* (1974), connecting personality types to a class of persons who work in similar ways to others, and to concepts of group and role. They also cited prominently B. G. Ananiev's, *The Human Being as Object of Cognition* (1974), for encouraging the unity of the sciences by claiming biological laws are continuous with social ones. Since the doctrine of reflection required a correspondence of the material and the mental, this is an example of a metaphysic underlying dialectical materialism.

Thus, social psychology dealt with concepts important to the professional and private spheres: activity, group, and "the collective." However, the acknowledgment of statistical and mathematical methods occurred without extensive application of them. Survey data were not allowed, and thus the entire field of attitude study went undeveloped; however, attitude change and cognitive dissonance received thorough descriptive treatment. Hiebsch and Vorweg (1980) mention Rubinstein's concepts of the "background of attitudes" and their "inner Reflection of conditions" (pp. 242-243). Scientific pretensions did not match reality. Knowledge of the American and West German literature was impressive, but experimental work lagged. Authors did frequently cite East German publications, indicating an indigenous tradition, but these were often replications of North American work. In a field possibly preempted by Marxism such as dialectical materialism, the linkage to society at large-achieved in the West through competitive funding for research-was lacking.

## **Conclusion**

We have explained psychological practice in the former German Democratic Republic in two ways. Practice in everyday education and social life reveals the complexity of ideology's influence on culture. But practice also refers to actual psychological investigative practice. The reception of the Soviet psychological practice and theory of Rubinstein and Leontiev reflects practice in both senses. Activity theory and reflection theory entered into education; but psychologists ignored real issues such as sexism, improving statistical methods, and testing. Ironically, a sociobiological bias coexisted in developmental psychology with the environmentalism that is Marxism-Leninism, while social psychologists prevented from gathering survey data could hardly do meaningful studies.

After the unification year in Germany, communism's neglect of authentic research practices became obvious. Some East Germans aligned with West German laboratories to learn to use statistical methods and computer programs. Others purchased private equipment. Many others simply lost their positions as departments were eliminated (*abgewickelt*). Whether East Germans viewed psychology as emancipated or colonized by the West depended in part on how they faced the future: by retraining or by early retirement (Woodward, 1991).



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