Aleksei N. Leontiev's Research on Memory and its Meaning as the Soviet Avant-Garde Science of the Future

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Abstract:

This paper presents a notable Soviet psychologist of Vygotsky-Luria Circle Aleksei N. Leontiev, overviews his contribution to psychological research, and explores the Vygotsky-Leontiev-Zinchenko strand in psychological studies of human memory and remembering. The general framework of Vygotskian “Superman science” as a component of uniquely Soviet avant-garde science is also covered in this paper.

Keywords:
Lev Vygotsky, Ivan Pavlov, Aleksei N. Leontiev, Aleksandr Zaporozhets, Piotr Zinchenko, memory, remembering, avant-garde science, “new psychology”, “Superman science”

Aleksei N. Leontiev: The three reasons to remember the name

Aleksei N. Leontiev (1903-1979) was a Soviet psychologist, whose life and legacy is closely associated with the names and scholarly legacies of prominent Soviet intellectuals, neuropsychologist Alexander Luria (1902-1977) and developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). The latter is well-known as the third member of the “troika” (the three, or threesome in Russian) of Russian intellectuals on the list of “the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century” (occupying the 83rd position and following his contemporaries Ivan Pavlov, 1849-1936, on the 24th place and Alexander Luria, on the 69th place on the list), as measured by a study conducted by and among North American scholars in early 21st century (HAGGBLOOM et al., 2002). It is by virtue of this association with the most eminent Russian psychologists that Leontiev is known nowadays—but definitely not only for that.

The second reason for Leontiev’s historical fame, primarily in domestic context, is his prominence in the history of Russian psychology of Soviet era as a major administrative and organizational force in his capacity of the founder and the first Dean of one of the two national Faculties of Psychology, both officially sanctioned in December 1965 and launched in 1966 in the Soviet Union. Due to a combination of factors—such as personal charm, charisma, fluency in French that suggested a somewhat aristocratic flavor so much admired at that time in certain circles of Russian intelligentsia, and the notorious obscurity of his oral and written presentations that created the image of enigma and hinted at the possession of the mysterious supreme knowledge of a sage—Leontiev became a cult figure for his numerous admirers and followers in the Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU) that would become a stronghold for the Leontievian clan until the very last days of his life. Virtually immediately following his death in 1979, the Leontievian reign at the MSU was overturned and overtaken by a rival clan of Soviet psychologists from the second most powerful Faculty of Psychology, the one at the Leningrad (renamed St.-Petersburg) State University, the other Faculty that opened in 1966. The mastermind of
this administrative coup was Boris Lomov (1927-1989)—a figure with higher-stakes connections than Leontiev’s in the highest bodies of the Communist Party regime in the Soviet Union—and his numerous associates and members of his patron-client network. This power overtake triggered a “game of thrones” of local scale and after a while, the remnants of the Leontievian clan eventually regained the power at the Faculty of Psychology in Moscow State University in 2000. Thus, this university remains, perhaps, the only Russian stronghold of his former students and key localization of the cult of Aleksei N. Leontiev in the 21st century, but the charms of both the cult and the legacy of its main figure considerably decreased in this millennium.

Yet, there is another, the third reason why the image of Aleksei N. Leontiev has not faded away into a complete posthumous oblivion pretty much like a great many of intellectuals before or after him. The reason is his Marxist—or quasi-Marxist, as some might say—theorizing and speculations in the field of psychology and allied fields of knowledge. This aspect of his intellectual legacy brings us into the pre-history of what is now known as “cultural-historical psychology” and “activity theory” in the Soviet Union as they were developed by the members of the so-called Vygotsky-Luria Circle (YASNITSKY, 2016b). Historically, the three names are often associated with the Circle: Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev. The three are often described as a “troika”, which exclusively created a “cultural-historical theory” in Soviet Union before the World War II. Such portrayal is definitely erroneous and does not fit the evidence that we now have. First, the label of “cultural-historical” emerged in the critical discussions of Vygotsky and Luria’s scholarship in early 1930s, to be subsequently assimilated by Vygotsky’s followers and broader academic community after Vygotsky’s death (KEILER, 2019). Second, no such theory was ever created by Vygotsky, Luria or any of their associates: only a few—often inconsistent and self-contradictory theoretical sketches—of psychological system of thought were produced. These sketches might cumulatively qualify for a claim for several theories in psychology, but definitely not a single accomplished one. Third, the unity of the three key protagonists of the “troika” narrative kept relatively united for a short period of time, roughly in 1926-1930, to be gradually driven apart on many grounds in 1930s. Finally, their roles within the Circle differed very much.

Luria was Vygotsky’s long-time partner and collaborator: the duo had a considerable history of interrelations and productively worked on a number of research and writing projects. Furthermore, despite the numerous claims that Luria made on a number of occasions, he was not only Vygotsky’s humble follower and student, but also he was instrumental in essentially influencing Vygotsky’s thought and theorizing in many ways (LAMDAN, 2019). In contrast, Leontiev always played a “second fiddle” in the work of this duo, although he also importantly contributed to the work of the Circle of its reductionist and mechanist period of the so-called “instrumental psychology”. And yet, Leontiev may be adequately understood as arguably Vygotsky’s best student ever.

Vygotsky’s distinct and uniquely idiosyncratic project in human sciences, as it was on numerous occasions presented in his oral presentations, private writings, and published works throughout the last

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1 On the clans of Soviet psychologists and their “games of thrones”, the idiosyncratic ethos of Soviet and contemporary Russian psychologists, the “Stalin model of science” and the “archetype of Soviet psychology” see (YASNITSKY, 2016a), also available in Spanish as the first chapter in (YASNITSKY et al., 2016).

2 This text is also available in Spanish as a book chapter in (YASNITSKY et al., 2016).
decade of his life, was the quest for a “new psychology” that he also formulated as a “science of Superman” or a “peak psychology” that aims (a) at the heights (as opposed to Freudian “depths” or “surface-level” of everyday behaviors of interest to behaviorists of various kinds) of the (b) potential supreme human being (as opposed to the actual existing average human type). This aspect of the core of Vygotsky’s unique proposal as a perfect instance of the bold and radical “revolutionary experiments” in human sciences—such as the scientific quest for life extension and even immortality (KREMENTSOV, 2013)—and distinctly Soviet “avant-garde science” in psychological research has largely remained ignored and was brought to light most recently (YASNITSKY, 2019). Then, on methodological and conceptual plane, Lev Vygotsky’s another important proposal was the call for a “psychological materialism” that he advocated for, by analogy with Karl Marx’ and Friedrich Engels’ “historical materialism” as a methodological and conceptual framework between philosophy proper and concrete historical and sociological research. Similarly, Vygotsky’s proposal for a “psychological materialism” reflected the perceived need in a middle-level knowledge base between Marxist philosophy and concrete psychological research—theoretical and empirical alike—in the real world context and applied settings of the Soviet Union of 1920s-1930s. Vygotsky proposed that a book on “Psychological Materialism” be written, but he never wrote such a book. In fact, in retrospect, neither of Vygotsky’s two major proposals—the truly scientific “new psychology” of Superman and the “psychological materialism”—was materialized during his life time. Yet, in the conclusion of Vygotsky’s obituary that Leontiev published in 1934, the last phrase of this publication unambiguously states: “What L.S. Vygotsky has done in science will not die, since it constitutes the first stage of the movement toward the truly scientific, Marxist psychology” (LEONTIEV, 1934). Thus, Leontiev may well be considered as the best student of Vygotsky, by virtue of being the only scholar of the time, who made an effort at theoretical development of Vygotsky’s general and overarching Marxist psychological theory. The material outcome of this effort—manuscripts and publications—did not appear until after Vygotsky’s death, though.

A Brief Overview of Aleksei N. Leontiev’s Publications
During his life, Leontiev made quite a few publications: the most updated list of his published scholarly works comprises 282 items apart from other, non-academic newspaper and journal publications, interviews, popular articles, etc. (the bibliography is available online at http://www.anleontiev.smysl.ru/sp_publ.htm). It appears that Leontiev produced not so many books.

Table 1. Aleksei N. Leontiev’s Monographs and Major Books

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<tr>
<th>Book Title in English</th>
<th>Book Title in Russian</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year of first publication</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<tr>
<td>Memory Development</td>
<td>Razvitie pamiati. Ekperimental’noe razvitie vysshikh psikhologicheskikh</td>
<td>Uchpedgiz</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Monograph</td>
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As an interesting example of the “avant-garde science” is the case of Russian scholar and expatriate philologist and linguist, Vygotsky’s contemporary and Luria’s associate, Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) (TOMAN, 1995).
Curiously enough, only three items on the list may qualify as the author’s major monographs, that is, books that Leontiev wrote fully (or relatively) independently as a single purpose specialized projects. Even so, one of the three—the “Rehabilitation of Hand Function” of 1945 (item 29 on the list)—was co-authored with his former student Aleksandr Zaporozhets (1905-1981). Another book is a 120 pages long extended brochure, a shortened version of Leontiev’s doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Ivan Pavlov’s administrative and “intellectual heir”, physiologist and academician Leon Orbeli (1882-1958) and defended in Leningrad in 1940 (the manuscript was lost during the World War II), the “Outline of the Psyche Development” [Ocherk razvitiia psikhiki] of 1947 (item 39 on the list). The rest is scholarly articles, encyclopedia entries, brochures, edited books, and book compilations of the author’s previously published texts, such as the two well-known books “The Problems of Psyche Development” [Problemy razvitiia psikhiki] (first edition of 1959) and “Activity. Consciousness. Personality” [Deiatel’nost’. Soznanie. Lichnost’] (first edition of 1975)—the book that was published in two editions within just four years before the author’s death and is often positioned and discussed as Leontiev’s major theoretical work that summarized all his intellectual legacy by the end of his life. However, one needs to keep it in mind that “Activity. Consciousness. Personality” (1975; 2nd ed. 1977) was not a whole new and original monograph, but a collection of journal articles that he had published on different occasions in 1947-1974.

Table 2. A.N. Leontiev’s “Activity. Consciousness. Personality” (1975): The composition of the book and chronology of its chapters’ first publications

<table>
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<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Chapter title</th>
<th>Original title</th>
<th>First publication</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monograph (in collaboration with A.V. Zaporozhets)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monograph/Brochure</td>
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<td>1947</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collected papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collected papers</td>
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4 The translation of the book title is given here by its English title of 1960 printed by Pergamon Press.
### The other major collection of Leontiev's work is his “The Problems of Psyche Development” (1959) that in Soviet Union alone (i.e. not to mention foreign translations of the book) was eventually multiplied in overall 4 editions (editions 2-4 in 1965, 1972, and 1981) and earned its author the prestigious Lenin Prize in 1963. In many ways reminiscent of “Activity. Consciousness. Personality” by its design, this book is, however, quite remarkable. The book's opening chapter titled “The problem of the emergence of sensation” [Problema vozniknoveniia oshchushcheniia] that comprises a quarter of the whole book, was a first publication of a fragment of Leontiev’s doctoral dissertation. This fragment not only sheds light on his and his team’s research activities in Kharkov and Moscow in 1933-36, but also gives us an insight into an exciting development of quintessentially Vygotskian “avant garde science” research program that has been largely ignored and by-passed by the international scholarly community to date.

All this explains our subjective interest in and objective importance of Leontiev's first book, the “Memory Development” of 1931, written exclusively in the spirit of Vygotsky’s “instrumental psychology” of the decade of 1920s.

### “Razvitie pamiati”: the landmark of Vygotsky’s mechanistic “instrumental psychology”

Apart from being the first Leontiev's major book, the research behind “Memory Development” of 1931 is of considerable interest because it truly stands out as the only major published work that ever came out as a solid—theoretical and empirically grounded—monument and, in a sense, manifesto of Vygotsky’s “instrumental” research program of his reductionist and mechanicist period of 1920s.
Indeed, despite a series of other works published under the name of either Vygotsky or Luria or both, none of these qualify as genuinely innovative or original contributions to the “new psychology” advocated by Vygotsky. These publications were either teaching materials for poorly trained (i.e., lacking proper gymnasium education) undergraduate students from the democratic masses of the post-revolutionary time (such as “Pedology of the school age” of 1928 or “Pedology of the adolescent”, in three volumes of 1929-1931), or popular scientific works for general reader (such as “Studies on the history of behavior. Ape, primitive man, child” or “Imagination and creativity in the child age”, both of 1930). In fact, these volumes of 1930-31—along with the considerably delayed “Psychological Dictionary” of 1931 that Vygotsky co-authored with his younger associate Boris Varshava (1900-1927)—were the last books with Vygotsky’s name on their cover that their author saw published. Besides, there was the whole lot of Luria’s independent research projects done in parallel with his involvement in Vygotsky’s research and quite distant from his scientific agenda. An example of the latter is Luria’s well-known and influential book “The nature of human conflicts” that was published in English in the United States in 1932.

In contrast, Leontiev’s “Razvitie pamiati” [Memory development] (LEONTIEV, 1931) presented considerable data and theoretical generalizations that were done within Vygotsky’s research program and fully reflect the state of the art in emerging Vygotsky’s theory by late 1929 (the composition of the book was formally finished roughly by 1930, but delayed in printing and publication). The book is a perfect expression of Vygotsky’s theorizing and research program of 1920s in its naïve and simplistic beauty of early Vygotskian “instrumentalism”.

The main idea is the development of mastery of own behavior and performance: in this particular study this was the mastery of the psychological processes of memory and attention in the subjects of the study. In the manner characteristic of this period of thought, the researchers as designers of the study never questioned the subjects’ interest or eagerness to master their psychological performance, as it was—quite unfortunately—assumed as self-evident. Then, from theoretical standpoint, the researchers postulated that two types of psychological functions existed: the “lower”, “natural” ones and the “higher” “cultural” functions. These theorists never bothered to clearly define what these “lower” psychological functions were and what exactly would distinguish them from purely physiological processes. Instead, though, they articulated what they saw as the main difference between the undefined “lower” and the advanced “higher”. The distinction was the origin of the latter: the “higher” functions were believed to emerge as a result of instrumental use of some “cultural tools” artificially created by humankind in the process of the cultural development of the human species. Then, from this rather general assumption about the history of cultural development of Homo sapiens the researchers made quite a dramatic leap to ontogenesis, i.e. individual development of the children, who, in fact, were the most important group of the participants of the study.

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5 For the most reliable academic bibliography of Vygotsky see (VAN DER VEER; YASNITSKY, 2016a). For a detailed overview of Vygotsky’s publications see also (VAN DER VEER; YASNITSKY, 2016b), also available in Spanish as a book chapter in (YASNITSKY et al., 2016).
In order to demonstrate the correctness of their theoretical claims and assumptions, the researchers presented their subjects with what they thought to be totally meaningless “cultural tools”, the “signs” that would help the participants of the experiment to master their psychological processes of remembering and attention by virtue of association of these signs with the objects to be remembered or to be attended to. The specific experimental procedures and the main findings of this study are well-known and were generously described and discussed elsewhere. The discussion of the method of “double simulation” (pp. 37-40), Vygotskian “instrumental psychology” (pp. 65-69) and the “unexpected discoveries” of word meaning, dialogue, and inner speech (pp. 69-73) can be found in the most recent book of 2018 “Vygotsky: An Intellectual Biography” (YASNITSKY, 2018) that, according to the book review, brought its author the flattering reputation of the “new world leader in doing careful analytic work on Vygotsky’s heritage”. Suffice it to say, that in his first book of 1931 Leontiev triumphantly reported the empirically achieved demonstration in experimental settings the processes and, thus, the discovery of what they believed to be the development of “cultural psychological functions” of logical memory and voluntary attention with the help of the “mediation” of meaningless signs as “cultural tools”. That explains why in this book these “higher functions” were also referred to as “mediated functions”.

_Leontiev’s Revisionism as an Avant-Garde Science Project_

Yet, the triumph virtually immediately turned into a disaster. Due to a combination of personal and social factors, the researchers of the Vygotsky-Luria Circle very soon (and even before the publication of the book) realized numerous almost fatal problems with their theoretical assumptions, study design, analytic procedures, and key findings and interpretations. The first attempt to somehow rectify the situation was made in the very introduction to Leontiev’s book: the introduction was authored by Vygotsky. Apparently, that was not enough. Then, this was followed by another text that was published separately as a small brochure and signed by the names of Vygotsky and Leontiev—the only their co-authored publication. This brochure came out in 1932 and was distributed along with the book as its appendix with even further clarifications, self-criticisms, and more philosophically grounded attempt at correcting theoretical flaws of the book (VYGOTSKII; LEONTIEV, 1932). A remark is in place: a Lusophone reader might be delighted to know that this text is being introduced for the first time in Portuguese translation in this very special issue of Cadernos CEDES.

These numerous flaws, though, could not be corrected unless in another experimental study, which would not be launched until Leontiev established a major research centre in Kharkiv⁷, at the time the

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⁶ From the book endorsement by Jaan Valsiner, Aalborg University, Denmark, on its cover (emphasis added): "This is the first thorough coverage of the life and work of this Russian-Jewish scholar since my work with René van der Veer over twenty-five years ago (Understanding Vygotsky, 1991). Vygotsky’s psychological theories, based on his deep feelings on theatre and literature, continue to fascinate scholars worldwide. Yasnitsky has clearly emerged as the new world leader in doing careful analytic work on Vygotsky’s heritage." Along these lines, the author’s and his associates’ somewhat earlier work (YASNITSKY; VAN DER VEER, 2016b) has received a high assessment from Brazilian scholar of Cuban origin Fernando Luis González-Rey: “This book both challenges myths and introduces new beginnings for a contemporary study of Vygotsky’s classical works”. For a much lengthier discussion of the topic by the same Brazilian author, in Spanish, see (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2016).

⁷ Alias: Kharkov, in traditional Russian spelling of the city.
capital of Soviet Ukraine, where he (along with Luria) relocated in 1931. There, Leontiev quickly recruited a new research team, which carefully investigated the pitfalls of Vygotskian “instrumentalism”, and launched research under the supervision of Leontiev. This comprised three main strands: first, a revisionist study on memory, conducted primarily by Leontiev’s student Piotr Zinchenko (1903-1969)\(^8\); second, a ground-breaking project on the origin of sensation that provided Leontiev’s with experimental data for his own doctoral study; and, third, after Leontiev’s departure from Kharkiv in 1934, a large-scale research on perception [vospriiatie] that was conducted by Leontiev’s former student, administrative successor in Kharkiv and his future collaborator on Leontiev’s second book Aleksandr Zaporozhets. This major study by the Zaporozhets’ team can be seen as the direct and enriched continuation of early Vygotsky’s work on the “psychology of art” and its contribution to the development of the “new man”, or the Superman, in Vygotsky’s parlance. To our great regret, the final manuscript of Zaporozhets’ doctoral dissertation perished during the World War II in heavily bombed and largely destroyed Kharkiv, several times occupied and retaken by the Nazi and the Soviet Red Army forces. The detailed discussion of the Zaporozhets’ team research remains beyond the scope of this paper. Luckily, these studies were sufficiently well presented and discussed in a series of publications on the so-called “Kharkov school of psychology” (YASNITSKY; FERRARI, 2008a, 2008b).

Apparently, Aleksei N. Leontiev well learnt the lesson of his first book and its multiple flaws. Indeed, Piotr Zinchenko’s study under the guidance of Leontiev perfectly demonstrated clear understanding of the main weaknesses of Vygotsky’s “instrumentalism”, which Vygotsky most critically scrutinized in his “revisionist” writings such as the already mentioned (VYGOTSKII; LEONTIEV, 1932), as well as in his numerous private notes and public presentations of roughly 1930-32. Following the “revisionist Vygotsky” himself and a few of their contemporaries—such as the founder of the Soviet Marxist psychology Sergei Rubinstein (1889-1960) (YASNITSKY, 2020)—Zinchenko generously and very correctly criticized the radical distinction between the “natural” lower and the “cultural” higher functions. Furthermore, he hinted at his familiarity with Vygotsky’s self-criticism of isolated psychological functions in favour of the systems of such functions: in his research, Zinchenko investigated not an isolated and fairly abstract “memory-function”, as if such a “function” in fact existed. Furthermore, he astutely avoided an implied bias of a unified “memory” as presumably a tripartite cognitive capacity for “information storage, preservation, and retrieval”, in the computer and cognitive science parlance that would come to prominence in psychology under the intellectual influence and domination of North American thought-style after the WWII. Instead, Zinchenko focused on a concrete, real-world process of

\(^8\) Piotr (Petr, or Peter; Petro in Ukrainian) Zinchenko (not to be confused with Vladimir Petrovich Zinchenko, 1931-2014, his son, also a noted Soviet—then, Russian—psychologist) has remained a virtually unknown figure to a Lusophone reader. So, the longest and, perhaps, the best exposition of Zinchenko’s work in Portuguese can be found in doctoral dissertation by Sandro Henrique Vieira De Almeida titled “Psicologia histórico-cultural da memória” and defended in 2008 at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo. At the time of writing this paper, the full text of the dissertation is available online: [http://livros01.livrosgratis.com.br/cp056390.pdf](http://livros01.livrosgratis.com.br/cp056390.pdf), for the discussion of Zinchenko’s study in question see specifically pages 86-102. For apparent reasons, the author of the present article does not have to agree with each and every statement made in this dissertation, yet highly recommends the text to the Lusophone readership. In addition, a couple of Zinchenko’s studies and publications of 1930s are available in English translations (ZINCHENKO, 1983, 2008). The reader might also benefit from getting acquainted with discussion of Zinchenko’s and Zinchenko-inspired research in its historical development in (MESCHERYAKOV, 2008; YASNITSKY, 2008; YASNITSKY; IVANOVA, 2011).
remembering. Then, the design of his study was slightly reminiscent of the “instrumental method” of “double stimulation”, yet instead of meaningless signs (as theoretical notions that help explaining the process of “mediation” and “internalization”), Zinchenko reconceptualized the “psychological tools” as having their objective meaning and subjective sense—the distinction and the interplay between the two (and the multiple derivatives of “sense” and “consciousness”) is absolutely essential (YASNITSKY; VAN DER VEER, 2016a).

Zinchenko and his academic supervisor Leontiev demonstrated that remembering as a live and dynamic psychological process in the real world settings is a function of concrete meaningful activity9 and operations with objects. Unlike in Vygotsky’s and early Leontiev’s studies on the artificial development of voluntary, logical memory, remembering in Zinchenko-Leontiev’s experiments was involuntary, but by virtue of being a part of personally meaningful activity, in many instances by its efficiency it would even surpass voluntary, yet mechanical memorization in the studies of Vygotsky. Moreover, Zinchenko-Leontiev drew the distinction between the object and the background of activity in the manner similar to the Gestaltist conceptual pair of figure and background10. They demonstrated that not only the object of meaningful activity is remembered involuntarily in agency, but also even the background objects are remembered, too, although at a considerably lower rate. One might speculate that remembering background objects might be partly attributed to the subconscious subjective, personal sense these objects have to the people; but this is a theoretical proposal that does not seem to really ever occur to the originators of the study.

The exciting study of Zinchenko-Leontiev belongs to the classics of psychological research and in many ways it predated the later developments in Western psychology (CRAIK; LOCKHART, 2008; MACE, 2008; MCCAFFERTY, 2008; MESCHERYAKOV, 2008). Yet, the full beauty of Vygotsky’s proposal of “avant-garde science” of the psychology of Superman unfolds in Leontiev’s team daring research on the emergence and development of sensation that, by the standards of contemporary post-positivist science, might qualify as marginally “scientific” and bordering on parapsychology. Indeed, in his doctoral research Leontiev assumed that sensation can be developed in experimental settings not only that normally exists in human beings, but also such that is not observed under normal circumstances. In this case, Leontiev tested human ability to develop a sensation of light colour by the skin of human hand, which by all standards of average, “normal” human behavior should be regarded as an extra-sensory ability. In rigorous experimental settings of psycho-physiological laboratories in Moscow and Kharkiv Leontiev’s study—conducted under the supervision of Ivan Pavlov’s closest student and intellectual heir Leon Orbeli—Leontiev did demonstrate the incredible: under certain circumstances the subjects of his experiments were capable of developing the extra-sensory abilities! The avant-garde spirit of Vygotskian over-optimistic research program reveals itself in the researchers’ belief of virtually endless plasticity of human nature, the extreme audacity of research goals, and the radicalism of the study that would hardly be conceivable in any intellectual milieu other than that of the Soviet intellectual environment.

9 Expression “meaningful/cognized activity” [osmyslennaiia deiatel’nost’] was overtaken by “object-related activity” [predmetnaia deiatel’nost’] in Leontiev’s later, speculative quasi-Marxist works.
10 For the multiple interconnections between Soviet psychologists of the Vygotsky-Luria Circle and the German-American Gestalt psychologists see (YASNITSKY; VAN DER VEER, 2016b).
Unfortunately, the magnitude and the full potential of this study remain unexplored until this very day. The study was concluded by 1940. Academician Leon Orbeli, the supervisor and the official leading Soviet physiologist, approved this research. Sergei Rubinstein, the opponent of the dissertation, the first ever psychologist soon thereafter to become a Corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the official leading Soviet Marxist psychologist, approved it as well. Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union was still the best friend of Adolf Hitler’s Germany. The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union did not start yet. Leontiev successfully defended his dissertation in the early years of WWII in Orbeli’s institute in “the city of Lenin”, Leningrad. This was a true triumph of Vygotskian “Superman science” and the revolutionary avant-garde research of the uniquely Soviet style. And yet, despite a few humble attempts of its continuation after the WWII, for instance, in the groundbreaking work of Aleksandr Zaporozhets and his associate, this line of radical, avant-garde experimentation was never fully resumed. To tell a story of this avant-garde scientific project would be a truly exciting undertaking.

Yet, this would be a whole new story of its own, beyond the scope of this paper.
REFERÊNCIAS


