

Lev Vygotsky:Revolt n Scientist

Fred Newman, Holzman, Lois



Lev Vygotsky

The contemporary debate in psychology and politics over the possibilities for human development has fueled a renewed interest in the early Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. In *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist*, Fred Newman and Lois Holzman argue that Vygotsky was a revolutionary who used—and advanced—Marx's method to make extraordinary discoveries about the nature of learning, development, thinking, speaking and playing.

In this provocative and accessible introduction to Vygotsky and current Vygotskian research, the authors draw upon their own fifteen years' work in creating Vygotsky-inspired therapeutic, educational and cultural environments. That work has produced the discovery that revolutionary activity, typical of early childhood, is the fundamental human characteristic. When revolutionary activity is arrested, not only do development and progress stop, but eventually even adaptation to society becomes impossible.

Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist is intended for undergraduate as well as advanced students in psychology, linguistics, education and philosophy.

Fred Newman, who trained in the philosophy of science, teaches at the East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy in New York. **Lois Holzman**, a developmental psychologist, also teaches at the East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy, and at Empire State College, New York.

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Since the 1960s there has been widespread disaffection with traditional approaches in psychology, and talk of a 'crisis' has been endemic. At the same time, psychology has encountered influential contemporary movements such as feminism, neo-Marxism, post-structuralism and post-modernism. In this climate, various forms of 'critical psychology' have developed vigorously.

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Lev Vygotsky

Revolutionary scientist

Fred Newman and
Lois Holzman



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If no painting comes to be *the* painting, if no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, still each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, recreates, or creates in advance all the others. If creations are not a possession, it is not only that, like all things, they pass away; it is also that they have almost their whole life before them.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

He not busy being born is busy dying.

Bob Dylan

*For Barbara Taylor, a life-long teacher, with the
hope
that our work will be of value to those who devote
their energies to teaching our children.*

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and to Empire State College, for its support and for the enthusiastic and serious desire of so many Empire students to learn about Vygotsky.

Introduction

Two years ago, when we first sat down to talk about how we wanted to write a book introducing Lev Vygotsky to college and university students, we faced both an exciting challenge and a dilemma. Writing ‘about’ Vygotsky, we felt, would be in violation of his life and work, insofar as we understood it. Like the brilliant twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whom he never met but with whom he had much in common (philosophically and methodologically, if not politically), Vygotsky railed against the ‘aboutness’ that permeated both the form and content of the Western scientific, social-scientific and philosophical traditions they both inherited. Their legacy was a methodology which was dualistic and categorical. For example, it separated ‘the world’ from ‘knowledge about the world’ (with ‘knowledge about the world’ consisting of explanations, descriptions and interpretations); it understood meaning to be essentially ‘about’ or ‘naming’ mental objects. No. We did not wish to write about Vygotsky. But what was our alternative to be? How could we present to you Lev Vygotsky—the revolutionary scientist?

When the Vygotsky revival began in the late 1970s, a favorite quotation from his previously unpublished writings was the following:

I don’t want to discover the nature of mind by patching together a lot of quotations. I want to find out how science has to be built, to approach the study of mind having learned the whole of Marx’s *method*.

(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 8)

Similarly, we did not want simply to patch together a lot of quotations from Vygotsky (or rewrites of quotations)—this, we felt, would deny the Vygotskian method.

It is clear to his followers and detractors alike that Vygotsky's 'learning the whole of Marx's *method*' was not done in some library. It couldn't have been; as Vygotsky's biographers Kozulin, Levitan and others make plain, the beginnings of the first socialist state brought enormous practical tasks which Vygotsky and his contemporaries responded to fervently. No, Vygotsky's brilliance as a thinker stemmed from his revolutionary activity—using/ reorganizing whatever there was available: Russian semiotics, linguistics and culture; German philosophy; European and American pedagogy and psychology; Marx and Engels; the intellectual, political, economic and cultural conflicts and contradictions of the new socialist state—to make something entirely new, a (search for) method for the building of a truly human science, one based in Marx's non-dualistic, non-interpretive, anti-about methodology. We wanted to use Marx's and Vygotsky's method.

Later in the passage from which we just quoted, Vygotsky wrote, 'It is necessary to formulate the categories and concepts that are specifically relevant [to the given area of phenomena]—in other words, to create one's own *Capital*.' In writing this book we too sought to create our own *Capital*. In this case (we are eager to say this before our critics do!), what we created was our own Vygotsky. 'Our Vygotsky' is plainly American while distinctly internationalist (he is a Marxist), revolutionary, activistic, developmental, clinical and philosophical. In saying this, we do not wish to be sectarian or chauvinist, only that 'our Vygotsky' grows out of who we are and what we have done.

One of us (Fred Newman) was trained in methodology, philosophy of language, philosophy of history and philosophy of science, where foundational issues such as the nature of the relationship between epistemology and ontology, the history of Western thought and thought about thought, and paradigmism—issues shunned, for the most part, by psychology—are basic. During the mid-1970s, Newman turned to clinical psychology, incorporating critiques of traditional psychotherapy made by the radical therapy and anti-psychiatry movements (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Laing, 1983; and Szasz, 1961) and the methodological concerns of Western philosophy and Marxism, to found the Marxist approach called social therapy.

The other of us (Lois Holzman) was trained as a developmental psychologist and psycholinguist. During the 1970s she was engaged in research that addressed methodological issues, first in the pioneering language acquisition research of Lois Bloom (1970; 1973) at Columbia University and later with Michael Cole at Rockefeller University in the search for an 'ecologically valid' psychology (Cole, Hood and

McDermott, 1978). At the Cole lab Holzman began a serious study of Vygotsky that has continued ever since, with a focus on language and cognition, and learning and development. Her collaboration with Newman, which began fifteen years ago, led her to engage the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of psychology and the limitations inherent in efforts to reform traditional psychology.

This book is one of the fruits of our years of collaboration. We have learned from and influenced each other, yet our different ways of seeing have never been lost; indeed, we believe the book is better for them. While you will, no doubt, hear our different voices at times, we hope what prevails is a passable synthesis of psychologist and methodologist.

‘Our Vygotsky’ is, to use Vygotsky’s important psychologicalmethodological discovery, the tool-and-result of a quite specific practice—the production and distribution of social therapy, a Marxist psychology and the educational and clinical institutions where it can be practiced and developed—which engages the super-alienation, and accompanying emotional pain and cognitive deprivation, of being socialized in the United States of America in the late twentieth century. Our fifteen-year collaboration has been a joint activity with the community in which we work, where our theoretical understanding of what a human science has to be is continuously advanced by the very practical activity of creating environments that make the reinitiation of development possible. As social therapy (the practice) develops (and grows in success and recognition), we gain new-found appreciation for Vygotsky’s brilliance and creativity as a revolutionary scientist. We read him with new eyes; we see things we didn’t see before. Our understanding of both his methodological breakthroughs and psychological insights about development, learning, language, thought, concept formation, play, etc., is the product of the community, movement, clinical and educational psychology we practice; it constantly evolves. As we continue to create our Vygotsky, to reinitiate community and personal development, social therapy becomes more and more Vygotskian, even as Lev Vygotsky is brought into social therapy. For there is no reason for anyone or anything to stop developing—even after what society calls death.

Chapter 1

Vygotsky and psychology

A debate within a debate

By all accounts, Lev Vygotsky was a brilliant and charismatic thinker, speaker, mentor and builder. He is credited by some with breaking through the stalemate in the debates within Russian and European academic circles about what was the proper object of psychological study, thus influencing the historical course of psychology as a human science from the 1920s up to the present and, in the process, giving birth to what can be properly identified as a Soviet psychology.¹

Born in 1896 (the same year as Jean Piaget), as an adolescent Vygotsky was passionately interested in philosophy, literature and culture. He was a brilliant student who, as a Jew in anti-Semitic czarist Russia, was limited in the fields of study and professions open to him. Nevertheless, he managed to complete a law degree, write a dissertation on the psychology of art, teach and publish literary works before turning his attention and creativity to fundamental questions of human development and learning.

Although he contracted tuberculosis at the age of 24 and was sickly throughout his short life of thirty-seven years, Vygotsky became the leading Marxist theoretician among the post-revolutionary Soviet psychologists. He formulated one of his primary concerns in this way: 'What new forms of activity were responsible for establishing labor as the fundamental means of relating humans to nature and what are the psychological consequences of these forms of activity?' (1978, p. 19). Even passing familiarity with traditional developmental psychology texts is enough for this question to strike the reader as radical: Vygotsky is talking about activity, not behavior or personality or traits; he claims that human activity (as yet unspecified) produced a specific human activity, namely labor, as the fundamental organization of the relationship between human beings and nature, and that there are psychological consequences of these forms of activity. This question

and the premises underlying it are steeped in the Marxian world view, dialectical historical materialism.²

Vygotsky's accomplishments are impressive: he played a key role in the restructuring of the Psychological Institute of Moscow; he set up research laboratories in the major cities of the Soviet Union and founded what we call special education. He authored some one hundred and eighty papers, many of which are just now being published. Vygotsky's practical goal during his lifetime was to reformulate psychology according to Marxist methodology in order to develop concrete ways to deal with the massive tasks facing the Soviet Union—a society attempting to move rapidly from feudalism to socialism. He was the acknowledged leader, in the 1920s and '30s, of a group of Soviet scholars who passionately pursued the building of a new psychology in the service of what it was hoped would be a new kind of society. As a contemporary Vygotskian scholar has described it:

This period, especially after the Civil War in 1922, was one of upheaval, enthusiasm, and energy unimaginable by today's standards. People such as Vygotsky and his followers devoted every hour of their lives to making certain that the new socialist state, the first grand experiment based on Marxist-Leninist principles, would succeed.

(Wertsch, 1985, p. 10)

Tragically, Stalin would all too soon put an end to this brief period of creativity and experimentation during which attempts were made to transform every area of human life—not only politics and economics, but also art and culture, science, the family, education and labor.

The empirical work of Vygotsky and his followers focused on education and remediation, and dealt with illiteracy, cultural differences among the hundreds of ethnic groups that formed the new nation, and the absence of services for those unable to participate fully in the new society. Further, Vygotsky never abandoned his love for art and literature nor his fascination with the clues to subjectivity he believed they held. Although his later works dealt less often with poetry and drama than the earlier ones, his methodological and psychological writings are clearly those of an intensely poetic author. Familiar with the work of the radical and avant-garde filmmakers, dramatists, graphic artists and painters of the immediate post-revolutionary period, he knew some of them personally as well (e.g. the poet Mayakovsky, the filmmaker Eisenstein and the stage director Stanislavsky).

Though they never met face to face, during the 1920s Vygotsky and Piaget were engaged in an intellectual debate about the relationship between language and thought in early child development. For the next thirty years, little was known about Vygotsky's work either in his own country (where it was suppressed under Stalin) or in the rest of the world, and the post-World War II West slowly began to embrace Piagetian theory and research. Then, in 1962, the first English translation of a significant portion of his writings was published (*Thought and Language*). While a few psychologists and linguists read the book with enthusiasm, *Thought and Language* did not have any significant impact on these fields. It was not until sixteen years later, in 1978, when the second English-language volume of Vygotsky's writings, *Mind in Society* (edited by Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner and Ellen Souberman), was published that Vygotsky's presence began to be taken seriously.

The vast changes in the world created the conditions for a more receptive audience among Western scholars for the materialist, social-cultural perspective on human development in general and the development of thought and speech in particular.³ The practicality of Vygotsky's insights and experiments concerning instruction and pedagogy in the elementary school years and for the developmentally delayed and/or disabled was of greater interest.

The fields of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics had flowered in the late 1960s and early '70s, in large part due to the 'linguistic revolution' precipitated by Chomsky's scientific discoveries about language and grammar in the 1950s. With these new disciplines came a keen interest in the early years of childhood, in the origins and acquisition of language, thought and communication. The philosophy of language, especially the seminal writings on meaning, predication, explanation and speech acts by Wittgenstein and his followers, Austin, Searle and others, began to have an influence on linguistics; their work led to intense research interest in the 'pragmatics of communication,' and, again, a search for the origins of such social skills. Not just words in themselves but 'how to do things with words' became a major focus (Austin, 1962). Side by side with the emergence of cognitive science approaches—which tended to look 'inside the head' for explanations of the remarkable intelligence and achievements of infants and very young children—were attempts to develop alternative paradigms, or models, to capture and express the essential socialness of language and communication. The more socially oriented scientists went beyond offering critiques of the reductionistic, positivistic paradigm which

dominated developmental research and tried to develop new models. Many returned to studying the rich historical tradition of models and paradigms outside of and, in some cases, oppositional to the mainstream of psychology, with its focus on the individual as the proper unit of analysis; they found much that was useful in these older works, and applied their insights to contemporary social and scientific issues.⁴ Within this rich intellectual environment, Vygotsky's work was a gold mine.

What also made Vygotsky more appealing in the 1970s and '80s than in the early '60s were the socio-political changes occurring in the institution of human science research. In the United States, for example, no longer were 'applied' areas of the social sciences (e.g. child development, learning and instruction, reading and literacy) regarded so plainly as of lower status than the 'pure' areas. With the failure of President Lyndon Johnson's 'War on Poverty,' the federal government was making severe cutbacks in research funds and insisting on a more pragmatic justification for the money it did allocate for research. Many of the once 'pure' social scientists in psychology, anthropology, sociology and linguistics were forced to turn their attention to applied areas in order to continue their careers. Many were also truly concerned about the severe social problems of the day, especially the impact of poverty and racism on educational failure and the role of communication in cognitive and social development and underdevelopment. There was a quiet optimism among some scholars that a more socially based and socially relevant psychology could contribute to alleviating, if not eliminating, social ills and injustice.⁵

The decade 1978–88 was a period of intense research activity. The group of psychologists, linguists, anthropologists and educators working and training others in the Vygotskian tradition grew and became international, to the point where in the late 1980s the existence of a Vygotsky 'revival' was noted (Holzman, 1989; Kozulin, 1986a). In the Soviet Union and many other countries, there was an upsurge in the publication of Vygotsky's writings (suppressed in the Soviet Union for fifty years) and works about Vygotsky and Vygotskian research—in 1988–91 alone, no fewer than seven new books appeared.⁶ Increasingly, we find references to Vygotsky's relevance to practitioners in early childhood, special education and adult literacy in newsletters and publications of associations for professionals and paraprofessionals in these fields, such as the American Montessori Society and the American Federation of Teachers.⁷ Textbooks in developmental psychology that formerly had devoted a couple of sentences (at most) to Vygotsky now

treat him as a 'school' nearly on a par with Piaget, Freud, Skinner and social learning theorists, and the recently established US National Teacher Examination includes questions on Vygotsky.⁸ To all intents and purposes Lev Vygotsky, the radical Marxist psychologist, has entered the mainstream of psychology.

THE DEBATE ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY

To the naive mind, revolution and history seem incompatible. It believes that historical development continues as long as it follows a straight line. When a change comes, a break in the historical fabric, a leap—then this naive mind sees only catastrophe, a fall, a rupture; for the naive mind history ends until back again straight and narrow. The scientific mind, on the contrary, views revolution as the locomotive of history forging ahead at full speed; it regards the revolutionary epoch as a tangible, living embodiment of history. A revolution solves only those tasks which have been raised by history: this proposition holds true equally for revolution in general and for aspects of social and cultural life.

(Vygotsky, quoted in Levitan, 1982, inside front cover)

The sheer weight of years of hard, creative work by committed Vygotskian scholars, coupled with the astonishing events that took place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in late 1989—and which continue as we write this—have transformed what was a revival of interest and research activity into a full-fledged psychological, philosophical and political debate. What is the relevance of Vygotsky's work to psychology today? With the demise of communism, why should we be interested in the works of a Marxist? Which of his contributions can help us deal with contemporary social issues? Was he primarily a psychologist, a methodologist, a literary critic? Was he really a Marxist: did he merely pay lip service to Marxian conceptions; was Marxism just one of several intellectual traditions that Vygotsky—according to some, a classical eclectic—incorporated into his very original thinking; or did the new world view that was Marxism permeate his entire life's work? Was he a hard-line Stalinist? What debt did he owe to Lenin? Why was his work suppressed in the Soviet Union for half a century—because he refused to censor Western (bourgeois)

thinkers from his writings; or because his work, particularly what he accomplished in the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was too radical for the bureaucratic and totalitarian Stalin? What are we to make of the recent flurry of interest in Vygotsky? Stripped of his Marxism, is he distorted to 'fit in' with Western psychological theory, as really a Piagetian or Deweyian or Meadian, or even an information processing psychologist, after all? How are we to understand his passion for poetry, theater, film? As the 'real' Vygotsky? As the idealism and spiritualism of a Russian Jewish intellectual youth? Or as a critical component of his contributions to a new theory and practice of human development? These questions and others contribute to the current (relatively) healthy intellectual-political climate in which fundamental issues about the relationships between psychology and politics, social science and social change, and reform and revolution are not only being raised, but increasingly appear in some manner, shape or form in the mass media.⁹

While we will touch upon all these topics to varying degrees, our main focus will be the role of Vygotsky and his followers in the contemporary debate about the very nature of psychology as a scientific enterprise. Of course, this is not a new debate. In its short history, psychology has had ongoing lively and heated discussion on such questions as: What is its proper subject matter? How does one engage in studying it? What paradigm, or model, will dominate—an existing one, such as the natural science paradigm, or something entirely new?¹⁰ Does a dominant and agreed upon psychological paradigm exist or is the psychological community still in the process of developing it? Some of the more radical voices in this century-long debate include the phenomenological psychologists, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, and adherents of humanistic psychology, hermeneutics, the anti-psychiatry and anti-psychology movements, and dialectical psychology and feminist psychology.¹¹ The Vygotskians bring still another dimension (and debates about it) to this broader debate.

PSYCHOLOGIST AND/OR METHODOLOGIST

Vygotsky as psychologist and/or Vygotsky as methodologist is a useful shorthand for characterizing the role of Vygotsky in the debate within the debate. The two descriptions raise the question of the vantage point from which one sees psychology in general and Vygotsky's contributions in particular. Perhaps even more importantly, the connective 'and/or' suggests Vygotsky's radical unwillingness to make

a sharp distinction between the substantive content of psychology—what it is about—and its more formalistic (for some, meta-psychological) method—how it is done.

Treating Vygotsky as primarily a psychologist assumes that psychology's nature is relatively clear, its subject matter and paradigm established. On this account, Vygotsky has made major contributions to the development of psychology and, while he has perhaps made some important methodological contributions, his work fits comfortably inside the dominant paradigm and can advance, deepen and reform psychological practice as it currently exists. Further, according to this view, his scientific significance will ultimately be a function of the ability of contemporary researchers to apply his specific findings about human development to contemporary social issues. Many modern Vygotskian researchers understand Vygotsky in just this way. (We will discuss their work in subsequent chapters.)

An alternative view (which we share with a number of philosophers, historians and psychologists)—taking Vygotsky as a methodologist who did psychological research in the interest of discovering what psychology is—characteristically begins from the vantage point that a psychological paradigm has not yet evolved and that there is still an active debate concerning the very nature and activity of psychology itself. From this point of view, Vygotsky's work was and remains foundational: he was engaged in investigating the nature of paradigms in general and psychological paradigms in particular as an essential part of developing a qualitatively new science. As Bakhurst put it, 'For Vygotsky, the identity of psychology as a science depended on the degree to which it could contribute to the transformation of the object it investigates. Its tasks were not simply to mirror reality but to *harness* reality' (1986, pp. 122–3).

Certainly Vygotsky made contributions to our understanding of human development, in particular the nature of learning and the relationship of language to thought. But on this view (which is also ours) he remained true to the scientific task of investigating the very nature of psychological science even as he made a host of practical-critical discoveries within the science of psychology.

Significantly, Vygotsky was a Marxist methodologist. Neither he nor Marx ultimately succeeded in creating a full-blown paradigm (or, if you prefer, an anti-paradigm)¹² for psychology, economics or history, but both advanced the ongoing debate regarding the very nature of paradigms in the specific context of their efforts to discover/create a genuine comprehension of human progress and human science.

What was Marx's methodology? The textbook version presented in the philosophy, political science and even some psychology literature speaks of the Marxian dialectic as 'the unity of opposites' and of Marx as a materialist, i.e. one who takes the material world, or matter, as basic and ideas, or mind, as derivative. But Marx's writings are far more complex and scientifically radical than this. We will need to consider ever so briefly some of Marx's methodological thinking to make clearer the debate within the debate.

INTERPRETATION-FREE SCIENCE

Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach, the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

(Marx and Engels, 1973, p. 47)

Marx, especially in his early philosophical-methodological writings, put forth the fundamentals of dialectical historical materialism, the methodology he was developing as a challenge not only to the specific dominant philosophical traditions of the nineteenth century, but to philosophy in general. For philosophy is interpretive. As a radical materialist, Marx insisted that the starting point of science and of history is life-as-lived, not interpretations or abstractions extrapolated from life. The following paragraph is one of the most succinct formulations of his methodology:

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.

(Marx and Engels, 1973, pp. 47–8)

Note that Marx insists that a premise is a real state of affairs, not an intellectually abstracted axiom from which implications are drawn—this, in itself, is monumentally radical. Virtually all of Western philosophy and methodology, from Plato to Descartes and Kant, is challenged in this statement. Marx exposed the dualistic and ahistorical nature of philosophy's foundation as propositions and interpretive assumptions, where premises are understood as separate from what follows from them. Particularly well trained in the Cartesian and rationalist tradition, Marx understood, for example, that Descartes had first to translate the historical actuality I-am-sitting-here-and-thinking into the propositional premise 'I think' in order to derive 'I am.' While in philosophy propositional and/or linguistic forms may be what follow from sitting there and thinking, this is not so in history. What follows in history is whatever actually develops from that complicated but describable social arrangement of sitting there and thinking.

What does Marx mean by history? Not surprisingly, not what bourgeois historians mean—they define history societally (usually referring to 'the past' divided from 'the present' and 'future/ or to 'what happened' relative to a particular spatio-temporal moment). History, to Marx, is the living, sensuous, continuous, indivisible totality of human existence, the complex yet describable 'process of development under definite conditions.' His methodology is historical and not merely dialectical insofar as: 'This conception of history...does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice' (Marx and Engels, 1973, p. 58). Marx developed this historical, non-propositional, radically monistic (i.e. non-dualistic) scientific method in his political-economic analysis of capitalism; Vygotsky advanced it into the area of psychology.

In one of his earliest methodological statements, written in 1845–6, Marx addressed the dichotomy between objective and subjective:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. Hence, in *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only

genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of 'revolutionary,' of 'practical-critical,' activity.
(Marx and Engels, 1973, p. 121)

While the concept of activity was not, of course, unique to Marx,¹³ the specification of activity as revolutionary, practical-critical activity did originate with him. Revolutionary activity is overthrowing/transforming the existing state of affairs, i.e. changing the totality of what there is. For the Marxian dialectic is not the abstract textbook 'unity of opposites,' but the actual practice of method whereby the totality of what there is (the unity of history) both determines and is qualitatively transformed by human activity. Activity theory, the psychological perspective with which Vygotsky is associated, partially originated with Marx's radically monistic and revolutionary conception of activity. Yet while most contemporary activity theorists acknowledge Marx as, if not the only founder, then one of the founders of activity theory, on our view most do not even remotely understand the revolutionary character of Marx's practical-critical conception of practical-critical activity.

The attempt to categorize Vygotsky, to 'dualize' him as either a psychologist or a methodologist, contradicts, ironically, not only Vygotsky's life-as-lived, but his self-conscious intellectual revolt against dualism.¹⁴ Over hundreds of years, Western thought had amassed an almost endless list of philosophical and methodological dualisms or bifurcations: mind, body; form, matter; past, present; particular, universal; individual, society; individual, group; empiricism, idealism; permanence, change; conscious, unconscious; premise, implications of premise. Vygotsky, like Marx before him, inherited these dualisms; within the newly emerging social science of psychology, they were pervasive and pernicious. In fact, during Vygotsky's early years the question of whether it was even possible to study the mind, consciousness or thought scientifically was the subject of considerable debate, owing to the dualistic conceptualization of the objective and the subjective. Vygotsky addressed himself to this debate: to those who believed the mind was subjective, that subjectivity was not worthy of or accessible to scientific study and therefore could not be scientifically studied; and to others who believed the mind was objective, not subjective, and therefore could be studied using scientific (i.e. objective, experimental) methods. Another, and related, dualism Vygotsky worked all his life to synthesize was that of the individual and