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## Thinking and Labour (Reading Vygotsky)

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Lev Vygotsky connected the development of “higher forms of thinking” with labour, and claimed that this connection is “central and basic”, allowing to unfold the peculiarities of children’s thinking and the new in adolescent’s mind. Meanwhile, the concept of labour in Vygotsky’s works has not been investigated so far. This article traces the “genetic nodes that connect together the child’s thinking and practical activity” (Vygotsky), starting with “practical intelligence” and ending with labour. Thus, the development of the child’s psyche appears as its ingrowing into the process of social labour. According to Vygotsky, the speech of adults acts as an “ideal form” in dialogue with which the child’s speech develops; the same ideal form is constituted by labour. The child’s practical activity develops towards labour through the stages of playing, drawing, modelling and constructing. The article touches upon the problem of mastering affects by means of concepts, discusses the connection between the conceptual and real “fields” in human consciousness, and draws a parallel between the development of consciousness and labour.

**Keywords:** practical intelligence, practical activity, polytechnic labour, children’s play, egocentric speech, affects, conceptual field, labour field.

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## Мышление и труд (читая Выготского)

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Развитие «высших форм мышления» Л.С. Выготский связывал с трудом и утверждал, что эта связь — «центральная и основная», позволяющая раскрыть особенности детского мышления и новое в мышлении подростка. Меж тем понятие труда в работах Выготского до сих пор не исследовалось. В настоящей статье прослеживаются «генетические узлы, соединяющие воедино мышление и практическую деятельность ребенка» (Выготский), начиная с «практического интеллекта» и заканчивая трудом. Тем самым развитие детской психики предстает как вращивание ее в процесс общественного труда. По Выготскому, речь взрослых выступает как «идеальная форма», в диалоге с которой развивается речь ребенка; такую же идеальную форму образует и труд взрослых. Практическая деятельность ребенка развивается навстречу труду по ступеням игры, рисования, лепки и конструирования. В статье затрагивается проблема овладения аффектами при помощи понятий, обсуждается связь смыслового и реального «полей» в человеческом сознании, проводится параллель между развитием сознания и труда.

**Ключевые слова:** практический интеллект, практическая деятельность, политехнический труд, детская игра, эгоцентрическая речь, аффекты, смысловое поле, трудовое поле.

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Labour – speech – thinking... In labour all higher, specifically human, functions [work].

*Lev Vygotsky. Notebooks*  
(not earlier than 1933)

## Introduction

The concept of labour in L.S. Vygotsky's theory has not yet become the subject of a special study. The key article devoted to this topic, "On the Connection between Labour Activity and Intellectual Development of the Child", has been almost ignored<sup>1</sup>. It was not included in the Collected Works of Vygotsky. The other works in which Vygotsky discusses the problem of connection between thinking and labour are somewhere on the far periphery of cultural-historical psychology.

Relying on Aleksei N. Leontiev's memories and assessments, Vassily Davydov wrote about the importance of the concept of labour in "the history of emergence and development of Vygotsky's psychological school". Vygotsky's keen interest in the concept of labour in other scholar's works was noted<sup>2</sup>. In his printed works and notebooks one can repeatedly find comparisons of instruments of labour with signs, the process of labour with practical intelligence and children's play. It is more difficult to understand how the concept of labour works in Vygotsky's psychological and pedagogical research. What does it provide for understanding the history of the development of higher psychological functions?

We will trace how Vygotsky reveals the psychological connection between thinking and labour, then how the "nodes" of thinking and practical activity are tied at different age stages, and finally we will consider the process of a child's cultural development as the interiorisation of labour.

### I. Man on the "path to freedom"

Vygotsky made his first approach to the problem of the connection between thinking and labour in *Pedagogical Psychology*. The difference of human labour activity from "animal labour" is seen here in its reliance on

"collective social experience" accumulated throughout world history. Thinking, on the other hand, is a cut off and suppressed "speech-motor reaction" – a peculiar social reflex, closed in other people's experience, not in my personal one [see: 8, p. 41].

The common basis of both labour and thinking is "historical experience, social heredity", which animals do not have. In the same paragraph, the word "culture" is also used, which would later supplant the expression "social experience" in Vygotsky's works.

There is no analysis here yet of the specific forms of connection between thinking and labour, but the system of coordinates has already been outlined: "labour – speech – thinking". It will be inherited by cultural-historical theory. By the time the book saw the light of day, Vygotsky had come to the conclusion that "reaction" and "reflex" were not concepts that could advance the study of social-historical processes and higher psychological functions. His fascination with reactology, however, did not prevent him from giving in Chapter X a brilliant historical-materialist analysis of the forms of labour education corresponding to the three types of social production: manual, machine and polytechnic labour<sup>3</sup>.

Polytechnic education aims to synthesise scientific-theoretical thinking with labour. Vygotsky would return to this topic – now already from the standpoint of cultural-historical psychology – five years later in his lecture "Practical Activity and Thinking in Child Development in Respect of the Problem of Polytechnism" at the First (and last) Congress of the All-Union Society of Psychotechnics and Applied Psychophysiology. The thought from the notebooks, which appears in the epigraph of this article, is unfolded here: "Labour was the cradle of all higher psychological functions, of all higher forms of behaviour specific to man... Labour necessarily implies mastery of the processes of a person's own behaviour" [11, p. 38]<sup>4</sup>.

Vygotsky's principle of the development of the human mind, as it is known, states that every psychological

<sup>1</sup> Although Aleksei A. Leontiev called it "the most important work" and quoted one line [see 16, p. 99].

<sup>2</sup> "Analysing the development of psychological science, L.S. Vygotsky does not miss a single case where it turns to studying labour" [20, p. 92].

<sup>3</sup> For details, see the work of Andrey Maidansky [19].

<sup>4</sup> The publication is not mentioned in the available bibliographies of Vygotsky. The inventory of the archive lists a manuscript (4 p.) and a later copy, but neither could be found.

function develops in the direction of its “comprehension” (*osmyslivanie*) and conscious mastery of it. From acting spontaneously, automatically, impulsively, it turns into “voluntary” (*proizvol'naya*, i.e. controlled by the will, *volya*). This is how all higher functions are formed.

Vygotsky calls this integral psychological process “intellectualisation”. Perception, memory, speech and all other “natural” functions are being drawn one after another into the work of *thinking*, obeying its requirements and conforming to its categorical structures. The core of the development of the human mind is the formation of concepts and their increasing dominance in the life of the individual.

A similar process of intellectualisation, it should be noted, occurs with *labour*, both in the history of mankind and in the development of the individual (provided that its development is carried out freely enough). Polytechnic education is intended to develop in the child *scientifically considered* labour skills, and to turn the labour itself into deliberate process, standing in each of its links under the conscious control of a thinking subject, a human being.

Such education on a large scale, however, is possible only under the condition of “complete polytechnicisation of labour”: when, owing to the development of techniques and technologies, physical labour will become “close to zero and the importance of intellectual labour will increase to a tremendous extent”; when the worker will turn from a rickshaw puller into a carriage driver. Even America, let alone Russia, is still a long way off from this, Vygotsky realistically stipulates. “Polytechnism is a truth for some future day” [8, p. 207].

By that day, the scientific principles and technology for the liberation of our psyche must be developed. Vygotsky shares this dream already in the 1924 paper that opened the way for him to big science.

“To master the psyche as we master electricity is the tantalising prospect of psychology... It does not so much endeavour to understand the human psyche as to master it; enough psychologists have interpreted the soul, we must change and reorganise it” [12]<sup>5</sup>.

Vygotsky's ideal is a versatile developed and “transparent” personality who controls and regulates the work of its “nerves and psyche”. A personality of this type Vygotsky sometimes calls a “superhuman”.

In the notebooks of the last years of his life, Vygotsky begins to develop a plan for a “height” or “acmeist” psychology. It will have to find out how “consciousness changes life” [1, p. 414]. Related to this was his inter-

est in psychotechnics, which was precisely aimed at the practical transformation of “life” (and primarily labour processes) by means of scientific psychology. But Vygotsky posed a bolder and broader problem, looking beyond the horizon of the present. To master the life of the soul and to control the inner world in the same way as we control the forces of external nature — he would not agree to anything less.

The keys to the cherished goal are in the concepts of intellect. In this point Vygotsky follows “Spinoza's star”. There are essentially only two possible life strategies — life by affect and life by concept. The behaviour of animals and often humans is driven by “blind desires” (primary affect, according to Spinoza). Can human beings tame this powerful element of life? How can we free ourselves from the “slavery of affects”? Vygotsky intended to give an answer to this question in his last book, *The Doctrine of Emotions*, but only managed to cover the formulation of the problem in Descartes and in the old psychology, which had split into two Cartesian halves — “explanatory” and “descriptive” psychology.

For a long time it was supposed that Vygotsky had no satisfactory solution. Recently published notebooks have revealed a clue: *the interrelationship of affects must be modified by means of concepts*. The rational awareness of an affect, illuminated by the rays of a concept, puts it in a different relation to other affects and changes its function in human behaviour. New affects arise, and the former ones are “isolated from the realm of instincts and transferred to a completely new plane” [4, p. 315]. This plane is called the “meaningful field”, where concepts<sup>6</sup>, not instincts, reign.

“In man as a *res cogitans*<sup>7</sup>, develops a *new relation to the situation* in comparison with the animal. The novelty is that thinking (the meaningful field) *introduces a new affect...* Thinking preserves but reorganizes the affects, their *ordo et connexio...*<sup>8</sup> Cf. with a child, we change the *Energiequelle*<sup>9</sup> so that he will agree to have a tooth pulled out: candy [as a reward], or you will die; we elicit a stronger affect... The affect in the concept becomes active...<sup>10</sup> Recognised cowardice determines our attitude to it (shame) [1, p. 471–472].

Man cultivates the natural affects of body and soul, just as he tames wild animals, as he transforms a forest into a garden or a grove by his *labour*. The natural wilds of passions are replaced by the “meaningful fields” of culture.

Theatre clearly shows how this work of the soul on itself is carried out. On the theatre stage, in the meaningful field of the play, affects are arranged in an order and

<sup>5</sup> The text is unpublished, quoted from a copy by Ekaterina Zavershneva, taken from Vygotsky's home archive.

<sup>6</sup> “The meaningful field ... for us are concepts, generalisations” [1, p. 467]. The topic is revealed in the excellent work of Zavershneva [14].

<sup>7</sup> “Thinking thing”, the definition of the human mind in Descartes and Spinoza.

<sup>8</sup> “Order and connection”, an expression from Spinoza's *Ethics*.

<sup>9</sup> “Source of energy”. Earlier, comparing the motivation of oral and written speech, Vygotsky referred to Kurt Levin's notion of *Energiequelle* [see: 1, p. 356].

<sup>10</sup> According to Spinoza, active affect increases our “power of acting” (*agendi potentia*), while passive affect (*passio*) decreases it.

connection dictated by thought, obeying the *concepts* of the playwright, director, and actor.

Thus, the value of Stanislavsky's system for Vygotsky is that it opens "the path to mastery of emotions, and, consequently, the path of voluntary arousal and artificial creation of new emotions..., creating a complex system of representations, concepts, and images of which emotion is a part" [2, p. 209–210].

The work of thought clears emotion of all unnecessary things, generalises and gives it an objective character – then the emotion becomes subject to the human will, "voluntary". This point is confirmed by modern psychophysiological studies of emotions, Vygotsky concludes. "To study the order and connection of affects is the principal task of scientific psychology" [2, p. 211].

Labour requires subordinating one's affective-emotional reactions and psychological functions to the *logic of the matter*. It is impossible to work properly – as well as to think – when you are at the mercy of "blind desires" and do not know how to curb them, or if you are unable to concentrate on the *subject* of your labour. "Ribot points out the psychological affinity between labour and voluntary attention". As Ribot himself says, "before the advent of civilisation, voluntary attention did not exist or appeared for a moment only, like a fleeting flash of lightning. Labour constitutes the most sharply concrete form of attention" [9, p. 369]<sup>11</sup>.

In the battle against the pernicious affects – the "passions of the soul," as Descartes called them – labour is always at one with thinking, on the side of the concept. In this perspective, thinking is nothing but mental *labour*.

Height psychology is called upon to comprehend the development of the personality as a process of its liberation from the slavery of affects, the subjugation of the natural element of mental life by the labour of the mind. Spinoza's lesson: human freedom is the power of the concept over affect, the scientific understanding and reorganisation of our passions.

"Freedom: the affect in the concept... *The grandiose picture of personality development: the path to freedom*" [1, p. 256]. "*The main thing in thinking is freedom: Ich kann was ich will*"<sup>12</sup>. From there it is transferred to action. But freedom is born in thought... *Concepts* – a new relationship + a liberation... This is the key to everything: the transfer (the action) in the meaningful field. Its freedom, its rationality" [1, p. 465–466].

Unfortunately, after Vygotsky's death, this "grandiose picture" fell out of the "meaningful field" of cultural-historical psychology, as well as his studies of specific forms of the connection between thinking and labour, which will be discussed further on.

## II. "The line of the child's practical activity development"

As we know, Vygotsky's theory tells us about the development of higher psychological functions. It remains to understand what the *purpose* of this development is, in order to turn it into the ultimate goal of a child's upbringing.

"The most harmful legacy of the old school" is the transfer of the goals of education "somewhere far away", orienting the educational practice towards the "abstract ideal of a perfect personality", Vygotsky asserts. The old school "passed by labour and, depending on this, organised life here, nearby, in the most ugly and ineffective way – overlooking those daily activities, that constant labour which filled, eventually, all of a person's time and took up all of his energies" [8, p. 313].

These sharp lines do not prevent modern Vygotsky scholars from "passing by labour". Some even claim that "Vygotsky devoted very little effort to the study of labour activity" [24, p. 44], or – in continuous cursive: "*There is no attempt to analyse the social labour process at all in Vygotsky*" [23, p. 28]. (No printable comments.)

In the habitual discourse on the development of a child's personality and its "higher mental functions", the main vector and ultimate goal of the development is often overlooked. For Marxist Vygotsky, this is the *formation of labour skills* – the ability to work skilfully, diligently and with *love* for labour.

The *Pedology of Adolescence* rejects a system of education in which "the child grows and develops without knowing labour". With proper upbringing, "labour is the natural atmosphere of life from the earliest years" and the adolescent's choice of profession is "the organic conclusion of a long process of development... Education should prepare the child for this step long before this step can take place" [9, p. 463–464]. He should be prepared for the future labour life to the extent that the processes of organic maturation allow it.

"But this is not enough", Vygotsky adds. "It is necessary to develop and create inclinations to a certain profession, love for labour" [9, p. 464]. *Amor labouris* is the active "affect in the concept" that determines the development of a mature, free human personality throughout its life path.

Hymns to labour in Soviet times were often heard. The problem is to clarify theoretically and, if possible, experimentally the role of labour in the development of children's thinking.

As the starting point of his research, Vygotsky takes *practical intelligence* – the instrumental activity of animals in solving special kinds of tasks that require find-

<sup>11</sup> The editors of Vygotsky's *Collected Works* removed the quotation marks and struck out "a fleeting flash of lightning", as well as much else that was not to their taste.

<sup>12</sup> I can (do) what I want. Sarah Slioberg's (Kurt Lewin's collaborator) words about the "unreal" world of play, fantasy.

ing roundabout ways to the goal. For this purpose, the scheme of activity must take into account the structure of the observed situation, the interrelationship of things within the “visible field” (the pioneer of practical intelligence research, Wolfgang Köhler, considered this a hallmark of intelligent behaviour).

Practical intelligence is a natural radical common to thinking and labour: both of them *emerged* from the instrumental activity of higher animals.

It is well known what great, paramount importance Vygotsky attached to the study of practical intelligence. It is the “genetically” primary – and at that experimentally fixed – form of connection between “natural thinking” and practical activity, equally in phylo- and ontogenesis.

Further Vygotsky traces “how genetic nodes connecting thinking and practical activity of the child are tied at each given age stage” [7, p. 589]. The concept of the child’s practical activity covers, along with child labour, also physical games, drawing and construction<sup>13</sup>, and any other activity in the surrounding world, in the course of which the *mind is processed by things through the work of the hands*.

“Piaget argues that things do not process the mind of the child. But we have seen that in real situation... things really do process his mind. By the word ‘things’, we mean the reality he encounters in the course of his practice, not the reality passively reflected in the child’s perception and learnt by him from an abstract point of view” [6, p. 51].

When Vygotsky begins his study of the age-specific forms of the connection between thinking and practical activity, he first summarises what his predecessors and contemporaries have achieved. He emphasises “two attempts that come from the psychological laboratory”. The first of these two theories, psychotechnics, solved the problem “apart from the notion of development and almost exclusively in a differential-psychological perspective”. This deficiency, Vygotsky continues, has recently been attempted to be remedied by “genetic and child psychology”. Its merit, along with the introduction of the principle of development into the theory, Vygotsky sees in the desire to “strictly separate the native, natural root functions of practical intelligence from those further changes of these functions and superstructures over them, which they acquire, becoming labour activity in the proper sense of the word” [7, p. 593].

Vygotsky repeatedly referred to Piaget’s words: “The child never really comes into real contact with things, for he does not labour” [21, p. 37]<sup>14</sup>. In this “thought thrown by Piaget in passing” Vygotsky finds “the key to understanding all the peculiarities of children’s thinking”! The development of thinking is made *towards labour* and the further it goes, the more clearly it is determined by social and labour needs and tasks.

“This connection of the development of higher forms of thinking (and in particular thinking in concepts) with labour seems to be central and basic, capable of revealing the peculiarities of children’s thinking and the new that appears in the thinking of the adolescent” [9, p. 334].

Rightly linking the qualitative difference between the thinking of a child and an adult with labour, Piaget does not demonstrate how “the synthesis between the intellectual development of a child, on the one hand, and the development of his labour activity, on the other hand, arises” [7, p. 593]. For Vygotsky, this is the heart of the matter. It is necessary to trace how practical “processing of the mind by things” develops into labour. Taking the form of labour, practical activity reaches the highest point of development, its “acme”.

At the end of the article there is a sketch of “the scheme of intellectual development of the child in connection with his practical activity at the most important ages” [7, p. 595].

1. As early as 6 months of age, the child tries to influence one object with the help of another; a few months later this activity develops into “the primary, most primitive use of tools,” i.e. into practical intelligence. As in Köhler’s chimpanzees, the children’s instrumental activity is at first in no way connected with speech. Speech activity at this age expresses *pure emotion*. It is not so much communication, Vygotsky explains, as “emotional contamination<sup>15</sup>, a transfer of affect” [5, p. 302].

2. In the next phase, between one and three years of age, the development of practical activity proceeds in the direction of its “syncretic fusion” with verbal thinking. From the first days of life, the child’s activity is organised through other people, with complete dependence on their activity, and accompanied by human speech. Accordingly, the child himself simultaneously acts and speaks aloud, forming a “fusion of speech and action”.

3. At the age of three, the child moves from “social speech” addressed to people around him to egocentric

<sup>13</sup> Drawing, taken from its physical side, too (experiments with a pencil, described in Chapter Two of *Thinking and Speech*). Construction, understood as “the algebra of things” (I.G. Rozanov): it is not the thing that is created, but the “thing formula” of *action* – “things teach how to assemble them” [1, p. 535].

<sup>14</sup> In these pages of the book it is said that the child’s thinking runs on a “verbal plane” and is as “impervious to experience” as the thinking of the savage. It is only in games, when they have to act with their hands, that children do encounter the resistance of things; despite this, the child’s mind and the savage’s mind do not go further than “beliefs” (*croiances*).

<sup>15</sup> In the printed text: “emotional *expression*”. I venture to assume that this is a stenographic error or an editorial edit. In the first chapter of *Thinking and Speech* and in his *Notebooks*, Vygotsky contrasts *communication*, on the basis of understanding via concepts, with *contamination* by affects (in animals, toddlers, and “patient D.”). The Russian words “expression” (*vyrazhenie*) and “contamination” (*zarazhenie*) are of the same root and similar in sound, so they can easily be confused.

speech. A fragmentary monologue spoken for oneself serves as a transitional stage to inner speech. Vygotsky was mostly interested in the “planning function” of egocentric speech in the implementation of practical activities of the child. It was necessary to catch experimentally the moment of transformation of the speech “mould”, the reflection of the components of activity, into a means of overcoming the difficulties that the child encounters in his practical actions<sup>16</sup>.

As a consequence, a new — verbal — plan for building and adjusting the scheme of activity is formed. Speech becomes a means and form of thought, “thinking aloud”. At this moment, the relationship between thinking and practical activity is reversed: now, verbal thought precedes action, anticipates and directs it. The word frees thought from the “slavery of the visual field”<sup>17</sup> and opens up the possibility of planning actions, one’s own and others’.

4. At the age of 6–10 years internal speech is formed and its separation from external activity begins. Finally, at the transitional age, verbal thinking develops into conceptual, categorical thinking, forming a relatively autonomous sphere of the “inner life” of the personality. In adolescents we find already “thinking in concepts, completely detached from concrete actions” [9, p. 395].

The isolation of thinking activity from practical activity is a condition sine qua non of the labour process. Human labour requires constructing a scheme of planned action “in mind” by means of words, numbers and other signs, before real “contact with things” takes place.

The first experience of action planning is acquired by the child in *play*. From play — through the “transitional forms” of drawing, modelling and constructing — the thread stretches to *labour*. All these are stages in the process of development of planned activity and practical processing of the mind by things (through processing things with hands). “From the viewpoint of the imaginary situation constructing lies between play and labour. Cf. the cluster of creative activities from one spring: play, drawing, modelling, constructing, and labour” [1, p. 534]<sup>18</sup>.

The genetic connection between play and labour is unfolded in *The Pedology of School Age*.

“Play and labour can be regarded as psychological antitheses. Play is the realm of instinct, labour is the realm of will” [10, p. 167]. But already in children’s play the instinctive form is overcome by the “game rule”. Instinctive activity turns into cultural, volitional. “This is a manifestation of the true dialectic of play. Genetically, in the game the mechanisms of labour mature” [10, p. 168].

In the practical intellect of an infant, the real field coincided with the meaningful field. In play, the meaningful field is first separated from the real one and begins to dominate over it, even if only in an “imaginary situ-

ation”. Labour “realises the meaningful in the visible” [1, p. 525]: ideal goals, intentions and meanings acquire flesh, taking on a material form.

In December 1933, Vygotsky drew a table of two columns — “Play” and “Labour” [1, p. 535]. The difference is that play obeys rules, labour obeys laws. In affective terms: if play is *Handlung* (action) without embodiment, pleasure is brought here by the process itself (*Funktion-slust*), then in labour “*Handlung*, embodiment of the intention = *Vorlust*”. For Karl Bühler, *Vorlust* (anticipatory pleasure) is the highest form of emotional experience: the shift of pleasure to the beginning of the process of activity, to the planning phase. The table concludes with the definition of labour as “play sui generis”.

In this light, the whole development of the child’s psyche appears as its ingrowing into labour activity: the formation of the concepts required for labour, mental and speech abilities, willpower, etc., on the one hand, plus the elaboration of cultural affects such as love of labour, respect for working people and the fruits of their labours, diligence, selflessness, etc., on the other.

### III. The interiorisation of labour

We have found that the concept of labour is the cornerstone of cultural-historical psychology. It is understandable why this stone is despised by those who value Vygotsky as a forerunner of semiotics, consider him a pretended Marxist, etc. It is more difficult to understand why Vygotsky’s *students*, who shared his attitude to labour and for half a century created the “psychological theory of activity”, did not wish to continue the research begun by their teacher into “the genetic nodes that connect together the child’s thinking and practical activity”. I believe, the reason lies in the fact that the axial connection “labour — speech — thinking” has become understood in a fundamentally different way, especially with regard to the function of speech and words in the child’s activity.

Let us open the main work of A.N. Leontiev *Problems of the Development of Mind* and find in it the paragraph “The specific features of the formation of mental actions” [18, p. 379]. At the very beginning Vygotsky’s name sounds here in connection with the concept of interiorisation, and that is all. Not a word about Vygotsky’s research on the formation of concepts, on the connection between thought and practical activity through speech, on the planning function of children’s speech — although Leontiev himself, together with Vygotsky, supervised Rosa Levina’s experiments, which clarified this function in the process of formation of “mental” and practical actions.

<sup>16</sup> Experiments have shown that the egocentric speech rate almost doubles when difficulties arise [see: 15].

<sup>17</sup> Köhler’s expression, picked up by Vygotsky.

<sup>18</sup> Note made during G.A. Kvasnety’s report to the Toy Council.

In the chapter “Speech” written by Leontiev for the psychology textbook [22, pp. 262–288], egocentric speech is not mentioned even in the section “Development of Speech in Children”. He edited and completed this text for ten years. In 1938–1948 the textbook was published in three editions, the volume of the chapter grew by one third, but there was no space for that form of speech, which Vygotsky considered “the first turning and decisive stage for the entire future fate of the development of the child’s thinking” [3, p. 11].

The state of affairs does not change in Leontiev’s lectures on speech in the General Psychology course at Moscow State University (1973–1975). Vygotsky is a frequent guest and interlocutor here, but egocentric speech remains a topic non grata.

Vygotsky was not invited to lectures on emotions and affects. Leontiev defines affects as “labels sticking to the situation”, and emotions are certain internal “orientating signals” [17, p. 466, 474]. As a consequence, the whole problematics of Vygotsky’s “height psychology” with its “affect – concept” opposition and the open “path to freedom” falls out of sight. It is absurd, indeed, to connect human freedom with the mastery of sticky labels or to visit the theatre for the sake of fresh orienting signals...

A.N. Leontiev and activity psychology in general made the appreciable progress in comparison with Vygotsky in the study of orienting activity and processes of interiorisation of cultural norms and forms of human activity, but even here emotions were hardly taken into account. Vygotsky sought to “move emotions from the backyard of the human mind to the foreground” and “to introduce them into the structure of all other mental processes” [4, p. 324]. This was the idea of his last, unfinished book.

Let us return once more to the question: what place does labour occupy in the psychological development of the child? The “natural atmosphere of labour” in which a child should grow up, of course, presupposes both his feasible, at first purely playful, participation in labour activity, then regular school labour<sup>19</sup>, but it should not be reduced to this, especially in early childhood.

The key to the answer to the question posed will be the parallel between the concepts of consciousness and labour<sup>20</sup>.

Vygotsky’s work “Infancy” paints a picture of a consciousness that is completely devoid of internal activity; it is nothing but a stream of affects in the processes of sleep and feeding. In terms of orienting activity, the infant psyche is inferior even to a newborn insect. But it forms a part of social consciousness and is thus initially social – a “consciousness of mental community” with

the mother and other people whose actions mediate all contacts of the infant with things. This primary phase of human mental development Vygotsky, following German psychologists, calls “consciousness of ‘primeval we’ (*Ur-wir*)” [5, p. 305].

The same is true of human labour. The infant is surrounded at every moment of its life by labouring people and objects created by labour. His personal life activity in every phase is mediated by the processes and products of the labour activity of others. He is immersed in the atmosphere of labour, within which (as its ideal – or, according to Vygotsky, “meaningful” – moment) our consciousness also exists.

The meaningful field of consciousness forms the inner layer of the *labour field*, a kind of endothelium of labour. The consciousness of “primeval we” is the first, most vague reflection of the material-practical ties between people – not so much an awareness as an affective “experiencing” (*perezhivanie*) of the labour community of humanity (in the sense in which Vygotsky speaks of *perezhivanie* as a “unit of consciousness”).

Consciousness and labour are social processes. If consciousness is collective mind, then labour is collective practice – *collaboration* (through sign systems, technical devices and social institutions).

Vygotsky includes the category of collaboration in the final formulation of the general law of cultural development: all higher functions “arise initially as forms of *collaborative activity*, and only later they are transferred by the child into the sphere of his psychological forms of activity” [6, p. 282; italics mine]. The concept of collaboration, joint activity of people, we find in the definition of the “zone of proximal development” and in the foundation of Vygotsky’s special pedagogy with its principle of “overcoming a defect” through collaboration.

(One can only wonder at the amaurosis of those experts who criticise Vygotsky for his “non-activity” approach. Apparently, “practical activity”, labour and “collaborative activity” do not count as a full-fledged notion of activity).

The infant is included in the processes of labour, as well as in the processes of social consciousness, at first only receptively, through the simplest affects. Its vital activity is only the potency of labour, or, to put it in Hegelian terms, labour “in itself”. All the subsequent cultural development of the child is nothing else but the *ingrowing of his soul into social production*, i.e. into the process of labour en gros; as well as vice versa – the *interiorisation of labour*, the formation of the child’s abilities for certain types of labour activity.

The ingrowth of a new person into the “ensemble of social relations” between working people is accom-

<sup>19</sup> A year before his death, Vygotsky was thinking about a book on educational labour. “The general idea – *school labour as a whole* (not mathematics, Russian) is a *new developmental type of activity*” [1, p. 417–418].

<sup>20</sup> For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that there is no such parallel in Vygotsky’s works, and the author of these lines does not seek, as is often the case, to pass off his reflections as Vygotsky’s views. This is an attempt to continue and develop his theory.

plished not only through “child labour” as such, but also through the meeting of practical thinking with speech, and through the subsequent separation of word and action, through the intellectualisation of psychological functions and the subordination of individual affects to concepts in which the schemes of activity and norms of social life are historically deposited.

According to Vygotsky, the *speech* of adults acts as an “ideal form” for the child, the source of his speech development. The *labour* of adults performs the same role of the

ideal form: the child’s practical activity is carried out in interaction with it and orientated on it in its development.

Observing how the “genetic nodes” of deed, word and thought are tied, how concepts are formed and mastered by affects, Vygotsky constantly kept in mind “labour as a central factor in all intellectual development” [9, p. 34]. This is the “acmeist” view in cultural-historical psychology – a view from the height of the goal to which the development of the human mind is subordinated and towards which it is directed.

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