

Revolutionary Thinking:
A Theoretical History of
Alexander Luria's 'Romantic Science'

Hannah Proctor

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Declaration

I, Hannah Proctor, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

In loving memory of Claire Walsh,
my first friend at Birkbeck

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Abstract

The Soviet psychologist and neurologist Alexander Luria (1902-1977) asserted that human consciousness is formed by and participates in forming history. His explicitly Marxist approach to psychology and neurology itself emerged from a particular time and place. This thesis seeks to restore Luria's work to its history, situating his research in its Soviet context - from the October Revolution in 1917 through the collectivisation of agriculture and Stalinist Terror to the Second World War.

This PhD follows the course of Luria's career through Soviet history, and is also structured around the developmental trajectories that informed his research. Luria's work was consistently concerned with tracing the emergence of the 'culturally developed' human being, defined as an educated person capable of exerting an influence on their environment. He argued that this figure was the result of various developmental trajectories: the biological evolution of the species from animal to human, the cultural development of societies from 'primitivism' to 'civilization', and the maturation of the individual from baby to adult.

Chapter 1 discusses Luria's early engagement with psychoanalysis and his rejection of the Freudian death drive. Chapter 2 considers experiments Luria conducted in Soviet Central Asia during the period of the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), exploring his engagement with Stalinism through an analysis of his attempt to trace a transition from 'primitive' to 'civilized' thought. Chapter 3 focuses on the contradictory figure of the revolutionary child, who occupied a symbolic position in Soviet culture between change and continuity. Finally, Chapter 4 turns to consider Luria's work with people who survived brain injuries inflicted during the Second World War. It concludes by arguing that the war violently interrupted the progressive developmental trajectories Luria's work had hitherto been structured around (which broadly agreed with orthodox Marxist-Leninist accounts of historical progress). It is at that moment, I contend, that he finally developed the 'real, not sham' Marxist psychology he had always sought to create.

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As an undergraduate at UCL, I was inspired by Rebecca Spang's formidable combination of humour, rigour and commitment to teaching. Her course *Rousseau, Marx, Freud* was a formative experience. Echoes of the conversations that took place in those seminars can be heard throughout this thesis.

In Moscow I'm not sure what would have happened if I hadn't met Elena Khrianina who gave me somewhere to live, helped me figure out the Russian archives, deciphered Eisenstein's handwriting and generally kept me company.

Thanks to my parents Marilyn and Neil Proctor and to all the friends who made suggestions, read my work or talked to me about different aspects of it: Jacob Bard Rosenberg, Richard Braude, Christina Chalmers, Sam Dolbear, Koshka Duff, Sam Goff, Rose-Anne Gush, Owen Hatherley, Sophie Jones, Ed Luker, Agata Pyzik, Michael Runyan, Amy Tobin, Andrew Witt and many others I've probably failed to mention.

The genre dictates that one thanks one's family or partner last, but this thesis owes as much to collaborations, conversations and collective projects as it does to any particular individuals. Sharing ideas with politically committed friends and comrades in London, Newcastle, Berlin, New York, Washington DC, Oakland, St Petersburg and Moscow, however fleeting those encounters often were, made completing a PhD less of a solitary endeavour.

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Note on transliteration

Except in the case of proper names familiar to the English-language reader (for example, Luria, Trotsky, Vygotsky and Krupskaya), Russian words have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress scheme and are italicised in the text.

Introduction

You know, it happens that an electric bulb will unexpectedly go out. It burned out, you say. And if you shake this burned out bulb then it'll light up again and will still burn for some time. Inside the bulb a catastrophe is taking place. Tungsten filaments break off and through the contact of the fragments life returns to the bulb. A short, unnatural, undisguisedly doomed life – a fever, an overly bright incandescence, a brilliance. Then will come darkness, life will not return, and in the darkness the dead scorched filaments will only rattle. Do you understand? But the brief brilliance is beautiful.

I want to shake the heart of the burned out epoch. The heart-bulb, so that the fragments would touch and to bring about a momentary, beautiful brilliance.¹

Yuri Olesha, *Envy*, 1927

Situating Subjectivities

‘Let us assume a brain has been removed from its cranium and placed on a glass table before us.’² In a discussion of the localisation of brain function, Alexander Luria (1902-1977) invites his readers to imagine a brain removed from its body and displayed in isolation, its gelatinous surface visible from all angles. In such a situation, he explains, it would be possible to observe a fleshy grey mass of tissue ridged with ‘deep furrows and raised convulsions.’³ The ‘uniform and monotonous’ appearance of this lump of dead meat, however, belies the living brain’s extraordinary complexity and dynamism.⁴ Observing a brain in such a manner, Luria suggests, tells us very little about human experience. His solution was to return brains to their skulls, situating brains in people and people in the world. As he commented in a lecture series delivered in 1976:

In order to explain the highly complex forms of human consciousness one must go beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity and ‘categorical’ behaviour not in the recesses of the human brain or in the depths of the spirit, but in the external conditions of life. Above all, this

¹ Yuri Olesha, *Envy*, trans. by T.S. Berczynski (London; Ardis, 1975), p. 71.

² Alexander Luria, *The Man with a Shattered World: The History of a Brain Wound*, trans. by Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 22.

³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 22.

⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 23.

means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence.⁵

In a speech delivered in 1924, over fifty earlier, he described his aims in strikingly similar, albeit more explicitly ideological, terms:

For Marxism, the human mind is a product of the activity of the brain, and, in the final analysis, of the effects of the social environment and the class relations and conditions of production underlying it on the brain and on each individual human being. Any attempt to isolate “thought” or “mind” as some discrete class of phenomena Marxism regards as an unscientific and patently idealistic approach to things.⁶

Luria persistently asserted that humans could not be understood in isolation from history.

The Russian Psychoanalytic Society, The Moscow Department of Criminology, The Communist Academy of Education, The Academy of Science, The Medico-Genetic Institute, The Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy, The State Institute of Experimental Medicine, The Burdenko Institute of Neurosurgery, The Institute of Defectology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the Russian Federation, The Laboratory of Neuropsychology - reading a list of the institutions and organisations with which Luria was associated over the course of his long working life indicates that his was a career of almost bewildering diversity which saw him engage in fields across (and occasionally beyond) the ‘psy’ disciplines.⁷ Luria’s bibliography, which runs to approximately 350 publications in Russian alone, is similarly expansive.⁸ His writings encompass monographs on handwriting, memory, speech and children’s play, theoretical articles on the relationship of Marxism to psychoanalysis, diagram-heavy textbooks on the localisation of functions in the cerebral cortex, batteries of tests for use by clinicians, and two case

⁵ A.R. Luria, *Language and Cognition*, trans. by James V. Wertsch (Washington, DC; VH Winston and Sons, 1981), p. 25.

⁶ A.R. Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology’, *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 40, 1 (2002), 26–53, p. 27. Originally published in K.K. Kornilov, *Psikhologiya i Marksizma [Psychology and Marxism]* (Leningrad; Gosudarstvenoe psikhologii, 1925), pp. 47-80.

⁷ Nikolas Rose introduced the term ‘psy’ disciplines’ to designate a range of scientific practices that since the 19th century have participated in determining how human beings understand themselves and that have helped to enable new forms of governance. See, Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1-21. Rose briefly discusses Soviet psychology declaring that much about the subject ‘remains to be analysed’ (p. 15).

⁸ For a bibliography of Luria’s publications see Evgenia D. Homskaya, *Alexander Romanovich Luria: A Scientific Biography*, trans. by Daria Krotova (New York, Plenum Press, 2001), pp. 127-161.

histories written for a mass audience. His clinical work brought him into contact with a correspondingly broad range of test subjects and patients both ‘normal’ and pathological. Luria’s shifts in disciplinary focus and institutional affiliation were partly dictated by the shifting priorities of the Soviet state which, as we shall see, forced him to abandon certain disciplinary approaches at particular moments. Yet in spite of these external exigencies and the undeniably capacious scope of his expertise, Luria’s central concerns remained remarkably consistent across his career. Indeed, he resisted drawing any clear distinctions between his contributions to such seemingly discrete disciplinary spheres at all. As his biographer and erstwhile collaborator Evgenia Homskaya notes:

All his life he worked at the junction of several different sciences. He always saw the subject of his study in its entirety (as a ‘whole’) and was able to synthesise fragmentary knowledge into a harmonious system.⁹

He described his life’s work as a continuation of the project instigated by his collaborator and mentor Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and coined the term ‘neuropsychology’ to describe the new ‘synthetic’ scientific discipline he sought to create.¹⁰ This thesis follows Luria in considering the distinct fields he engaged in as interlocking parts of a complex whole.

In a letter to his American friend and fellow psychologist Jerome Bruner in 1958, Luria criticised what he saw as the most worrying trends then emerging in neurology:

I think Engels was right by saying that “a function does not create an organ for its realisation”, and that's not to do with metaphysics, that's a real biology, a real mode of formation of modes of living. It would be a big failure to deduce forms of behaviour from pre-existing forms of nervous cells and nervous connections.¹¹

⁹ Homskaya, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ See, A.R. Luria, *The Working Brain: An Introduction to Neuropsychology*, trans. by Basil Haigh, (New York, NY; Basic Books, 1973), p. 105.

¹¹ Alexander Luria to Jerome Bruner, August 15 1958, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Archives (HUA), Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975-1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

These prescient remarks anticipate criticisms that have recently begun to proliferate in the social sciences in response to what Raymond Tallis has designated ‘neuromania’.¹² Fernando Vidal, in a much-cited argument that chimes with Luria’s discussion with Bruner, claims that the contemporary obsession with, and often blind faith in, neuroscientific research has led to a perceived identity between brain and self, giving birth to a new figure: the cerebral subject. Vidal’s work seeks to unmask the social and political assumptions that allow ‘neurocultures to prey on the most diverse pieces of evidence and the most varied beliefs in order to feed the ideology of brainhood’.¹³ Like Luria before him, Vidal stresses the dehistoricising tendencies of much neuroscientific discourse, which isolates brains from people and people from society.

Critical Neuroscience is a recent endeavour informed by the work of the Frankfurt School whose concerns overlap with Vidal’s. This emerging body of criticism attempts to probe the social and political implications of neuroscientific research: the values it mobilises, the interests it serves, the vision of nature and subjectivity it participates in construing. In their introduction to an interdisciplinary collection of essays inaugurating the project, Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby state: ‘The goal is to work towards an integrated approach to behaviour that situates the brain and cognition in the body, the social milieu and the political world.’¹⁴ The essays in the collection explore the ‘reciprocal interactions between neuroscience and social life’ and are committed to a ‘politics of situated subjectivity’, which refuses to accept the identity of brain and self or to cordon brains off from society or history.¹⁵ Luria presented the brain in a manner amenable to these descriptions. Taken at face value, Luria’s work thus seems to provide a powerful theoretical counter-balance to the dominant contemporary paradigms Critical Neuroscience seeks to redress.

¹² Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinistis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* (Durham; Acumen, 2011), pp. 29-49.

¹³ Fernando Vidal, ‘Brainhood, anthropological figure of modernity’, *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2009, 5-36, p. 20. A similar argument is made by Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Nikolas Rose in ‘Birth of the Neuromolecular Gaze’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 23, 1 (2010), 11-36.

¹⁴ Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby, ‘Introduction’ in *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience*, ed. by Choudhury and Slaby, (Chichester; Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 1-26, p. 3.

¹⁵ Choudhury and Slaby, p. 7, p. 10.

Luria was by no means the most ideologically fervent Soviet scientist, neither was his the only Marxist approach to human development elaborated in the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Unlike his peers, however, Luria dedicated a huge amount of time and energy to establishing conversations with psychologists, educators and neurologists in the West, thus ensuring that his work reached an international audience.¹⁷ Luria's position in 'world science' is assured; his publications still cited and revered.¹⁸ His mid-career shift from psychoanalytic and psychological research into neurological investigations dovetails with the history of twentieth-century developments in the 'psy' disciplines, in dialogue with yet divergent from his contemporaries outside the Soviet Union. Hitherto, the political orientation of his research and the historical context out of which it arose has not been emphasised or explored in any detail.¹⁹ Almost all of the existing literature on Luria is written by and for practicing psychologists, neurologists and educators, and is thus addressed to the present.²⁰ Such works treat his theories as compatible with contemporary research agendas. This thesis is also addressed to the present but by insisting that Luria's research was of its time, it is my hope to demonstrate that his work does not align so comfortably with current agendas and assumptions. Luria's work might therefore provide the

¹⁶ Conversely, the fact that Luria did couch his theories in explicitly political terms differentiates him from the most dominant figure in Soviet psychology: Ivan Pavlov. Although Pavlov's work was officially embraced by the Soviet regime, it was declared Marxist *post factum*: the reflexologist began his career before the revolution, was hostile to Bolshevism, and only embraced the revolutionary cause in the final years of his life. See, Daniel P. Todes, *Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Luria's former student Michael Cole informed me that Luria set aside a few hours every day to keep up with his international correspondence. (Telephone interview, September 23 2014). K.E. Levitin recalls that Luria's apartment had a 'huge custom-made mailbox' to accommodate his post. See, K.E. Levitin, 'Epilogue: Luria's Psychological Symphony', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 6, 36 (1998), 33-62, p. 53 Luria's commitment to reaching an international audience distinguishes him from Vygotsky's other major collaborator Aleksei Leon'tiev (1903-1979). This thesis does not discuss the influences of Luria and Leon'tiev's work on one another. On the historiography of Vygotsky's collaborators which challenges the narrative, dominant prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the 'troika' 'Vygotsky-Luria-Leon'tiev' should be considered as a single school of psychology, see: Anton Yasnitsky, 'Vygotsky Circle as a Personal Network of Scholars: Restoring Connections Between People and Ideas,' *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science*, 45, 4 (2011), 422-57.

¹⁸ For overviews of Luria's global influence, see: R.L. Solso and C.A. Hoffman, 'Influence of Soviet Scholars', *American Psychologist*, 46 (1991), 251-253 and David E. Tupper, 'Introduction: Alexander Luria's Continuing Influence on Worldwide Neuropsychology', *Neuropsychology Review*, 9 (1999), 1-7. Oliver Sacks (whose engagement with Luria I discuss in the Coda) was the most famous advocate of Luria's work.

¹⁹ Interestingly, a Russian-language overview of twentieth century Russian psychology characterises Luria's work as 'Marxist psychology' rather than 'cultural-historical psychology', the moniker more frequently used in English-language publications. See, A. V. Petrovskii, *Psikhologiia v rossii: XX Vek [Psychology in Russia: Twentieth Century]* (Moscow; Izd-vo URAO, 2000), pp. 8-9.

basis for an immanent critique of the scientific paradigms that his work is often included in, a kind of Trojan Horse sitting quietly within the city walls. As such, the key primary materials that form the basis for this thesis are not untranslated or unpublished material, revealing some hitherto overlooked episode in scientific history. Instead, my analysis deliberately focuses on Luria's most well-known publications, widely available in English translation, as I hope to demonstrate that attending to the manifest content of these works allows for an analysis of their latent and frequently overlooked political and historical content.

However, asserting the political orientation of Luria's research did not prove the uncomplicated process I had initially anticipated when I first conceived of this project; it transpired that considering Luria's research in isolation from the history it emerged from and influenced was as limiting as examining a brain on a glass table. Luria asserted that 'the eye of science does not probe "a thing," an event isolated from other things or events. Its real object is to see and understand the way a thing or event relates to other things or events.'²¹ This thesis aims to approach his scientific output in a similar manner.

The archaeological metaphor is a common motif in the often melancholic work of those attempting to rescue something of the optimistic utopianism of the early twentieth-century for the present, a past which could still imagine the possibility of a radically different future.²² Though sympathetic to such discussions, which intend to recover some hope from beneath the wreckage of the twentieth-century, in unearthing Luria's work I do not aim to pull the original artefact whole from the rubble, but to consider it in relation to the ravages of time: full of cracks and holes, and covered in layers of dirt. For Luria's Marxist approach to human development was not only conceived negatively, as a critique of 'bourgeois' western

²⁰ See, for example, *Luria's Legacy in the 21st Century* ed. by Anne-Lise Christensen, Elkhonon Goldberg and Dmitri Bougakov (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2009).

²¹ Luria, *The Making of Mind: A Personal Account of Soviet Psychology*, ed. by Michael Cole and Sheila Cole (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 174.

²² See, for example, Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY; Basic Books, 2001), p. 78, Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2000), p. 68, T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in the History of Modernism*, (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 1999), p. 1, Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London; Verso, 1990), p. 12 and Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester; Zero Books, 2008), p. 8

models, but developed in a particular, if volatile, historical context. As Marx famously intones in the opening pages of *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: ‘Humans make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.’²³ Luria sought to emphasise the connection between psychology and history, but his research was itself influenced by the dramatic and violent history of the Soviet Union: revolution, collectivisation, terror and war. His understanding of what constituted a Marxist approach to individual and historical development was also specific to his Soviet context. If descriptions of the brain today, as a malleable non-hierarchical network without centre, coincide with descriptions of contemporary capitalism,²⁴ then Luria’s understandings of individual development similarly overlapped with orthodox Marxist-Leninist understandings of historical development that permeated Soviet discourse.²⁵ Although he always asserted the primacy of history for understanding human psychology, a gap remained between his meta-historical framework and the concrete historical circumstances in which he conducted his research. This thesis is addressed to that gap. The gap I identify is not, however, understood as being located between Luria’s texts and the world beyond them but is treated more like a fault line that runs across their pages. Unlike in many of Vygotsky’s most celebrated writings in which eloquent discussions of Marx and Engels, Spinoza and Hegel, Shakespeare and Mayakovsky are brought to bear on psychological debates (often with little or no reference to his clinical observations), Luria’s publications more closely adhered to his empirical laboratory investigations.²⁶ Vygotsky often merely stated that human consciousness should be situated in history, whereas Luria’s works also *document* social history, providing glimpses of the experiences and outlooks of a diverse array of Soviet

²³ Karl Marx, ‘The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works, vol. 11*, trans. by Clemens Dutt (New York, NY; International Publishers, 1979), pp. 99-197, p. 103 (modified translation).

²⁴ Martin Hartmann and Alex Honneth, ‘Paradoxes of Capitalism,’ *Constellations*, 13, 1 (2006), 41–58. See also, Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* trans. by Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). I discuss Malabou’s engagement with Luria in detail in Chapter 4.

²⁵ Stalin’s programmatic definition of Marxist-Leninism can be found here: *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, ed. by a Commission of the CC of the CPSU (B) (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939).

²⁶ See, for example, Lev Vygotsky *The Psychology of Art*, trans. by Scripta Technica Inc. (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1971) and ‘The Historical Meaning of The Crisis in Psychology’ in *The Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky*, vol. 3, ed. by Robert W. Rieber and Jeffrey Wollcock, trans. by

people through accounts of his clinical encounters. History intrudes into his works in a manner that precludes them from being considered as self-contained philosophical treatises and hence complicated my initial attempt to import them wholesale into a contemporary context; his publications strain under the weight of their history. Analysing Luria's writings thus necessitated developing a methodological approach that probed the relation between theory and praxis, ideas and history; an approach capable of acknowledging that although his work recognised the primacy of history for understanding human consciousness it was, simultaneously, an approach to psychology with a history. Ultimately, this PhD contends that the attentiveness to history achieved in Luria's literary or 'romantic' case histories constitutes his major theoretical contribution and thus proposes that the fine-grained analysis of experiential specificity evident in those texts might be the aspect of his approach most capable of challenging the very different (though no less politically charged) assumptions and practices of the present. As in Luria's writings, the historical and theoretical objectives of this project are necessarily intertwined.

Psychology in Revolution

In 1976, a year before his death, Luria wrote to his old friend, the American psychologist Jerome Bruner, to inform him that he was working on a 'highly personal' and possibly final book, declaring: 'the motive is not to write an autobiography but rather a history of a social atmosphere after the revolution with all the enthusiasm of trying to find new ways.'²⁷ The resulting text, *The Making of Mind*, first published in 1979, forgoes a description of Luria's birth in 1902 and instead begins with the October Revolution of 1917:

I began my career in the first years of the great Russian Revolution. This single, momentous event decisively influenced my life and that of everyone I knew [...] My entire generation was infused with the energy of revolutionary change – the liberating energy people feel when they are part of a society that is able to make tremendous progress in a very short time.²⁸

René van der Veer (Plenum Press, New York, 1997), pp. 233-343. Tuberculosis forced him to withdraw from laboratory work in the final years of his life.

²⁷ Alexander Luria to Jerome Bruner, March 16 1976, HUA, Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975-1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

²⁸ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 17.

Luria clearly aligned his own personal and professional development with the fate of the Soviet project with which his adult life was almost coterminous (he died in 1977, less than a decade before the introduction of Mikhail Gorbachev's sweeping reforms).²⁹ This thesis will attempt to situate Luria's work in its revolutionary 'atmosphere', contextualising, supplementing and interrogating Luria's own accounts, in order to ask how this historical attempt to create a Marxist psychology might challenge the psychological paradigms of the post-Soviet present (which, like the globalised capitalist economy, now operate on either side of the fallen iron curtain) without, however, glossing over the brutalities and oppressions of the Soviet past.³⁰

Although Luria foregrounded the close relationship between his psychological career and the dramatic events of Soviet history, and his psychological theories understood human development in relation to its particular cultural milieu, discussions of Soviet history have not featured prominently in accounts of Luria's work. In the obituary that appeared in *The New York Times* sixty years after the revolution, Luria was described as: 'A Communist Party member who remained aloof from Marxist-Leninist ideology.'³¹ This statement implies that Luria maintained a contradictory relationship to the Soviet establishment: paying lip-service to the regime, while remaining intellectually autonomous. This narrative, as Loren Graham discusses, was typical of the Cold War-era. Graham identifies a tendency in Western writings on Soviet science to emphasise the distinctly Soviet qualities of scientists deemed unsuccessful, while downplaying the social and cultural factors that influenced the work of scientists, like Luria, whose work

²⁹ The main events of Luria's life and career are recounted in three biographies. The former two were written by his colleagues, the latter by his daughter. Homskaya, K.E. Levitin, *Mimoletnyi Uzor [A Dissolving Pattern]* (Moscow; Izd-vo, 1978) (serialised in English in the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*) and E. Luria, *Moi Otets A.R. Luria [My Father A.R. Luria]* (Moscow; Gnosis, 1994). A concise overview of Luria's career is given in: M.I. Kostyanaya and P. Rossouw, 'Alexander Luria – Life, Research and Contribution to Neuroscience', *International Journal of Neuropsychotherapy*, 1, 2 (2013), 47-55. For an analysis of his early career see: Michael Paul George Hames, 'The Early Theoretical Development of Alexander Luria', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, UCL, 2002).

³⁰ As Steven Rose notes: 'the enthusiastic adoption of Anglo-American reductionism in the former Soviet Union since the collapse of communism in the 1980s has largely obliterated that potentially fertile terrain [proposed by Vygotsky and Luria]' See, Steven Rose, *The Future of the Brain: The Promise and Perils of Tomorrow's Neuroscience* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 190.

³¹ 'A.R. Luria, Soviet Psychologist, 75; A Pioneer in Studies of the Brain', August 17 1977, *New York Times*, p. 12.

achieved international acclaim.³² As such, the case of the Soviet geneticist Trofim Lysenko historically functioned as the paradigmatic example of the detrimental impact of the explicitly ideological Soviet approach to nature, overlooking the fact that Soviet geneticists were themselves instrumental in discrediting Lysenko's work.³³ Articles published in *The Times* in the mid-1960s exemplify the tenor of the discussions that accompanied the Lysenko scandal. Lysenko is described as the 'virtual dictator of Russian biology under Stalin'³⁴ who conducted a 'reign of terror among his fellow geneticists'³⁵ and whose success was 'symptomatic of the close connexion between science and politics in the Soviet system [...] [which] fitted the communists' views about the infinite plasticity of man and Stalin's grandiose ideas about transforming nature.'³⁶ Similarly, Western discussions of the imprisonment of dissidents in psychiatric institutions tended to cast the USSR as a uniquely punitive and oppressive state, rather than considering parallels with contemporaneous psychiatric practices in the West or analysing other psychological developments in the Soviet context that did not participate in those repressive programmes.³⁷

A glaring example of the inverse tendency identified by Graham can be found in Jerome Bruner's introduction to the English translation of Lev Vygotsky's *Thought and Language*, published in 1962 at Luria's behest. Bruner is quick to state that Vygotsky's work transcends the time and place of its composition and should be considered as a part of global psychology: 'it avails little to trace the ideological course of Vygotsky's work through the groundswells and storms of psychology in the Soviet Union.'³⁸ He removes Vygotsky from his historical context and isolates him

³² Loren R. Graham, *What Have We Learned About Science and Technology from the Russian Experience?* (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-8.

³³ For a detailed discussion of the Lysenko case see, Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science?: the Case of Lysenko* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ; Humanities Press, 1977).

³⁴ 'Lysenko Methods Under Review', *Times*, November 3 1964, p. 7. The phrase 'virtual dictator' also appears in the article 'Prof. Lysenko Demoted', *Times*, April 6 1962, p. 13.

³⁵ 'Downfall of a Dogmatist', *Times*, February 5 1965, p. 13.

³⁶ 'Downfall of a Dogmatist', *Times*, February 5 1965, p. 13.

³⁷ There is a vast literature on the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union from the 1960s onwards. See, for example, Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Political Hospitals: The Abuse of Psychiatry in the Soviet Union* (London; Victor Gollancz, 1977). Although the relationship between institutionalisation, diagnosis and political dissent was not directly orchestrated by the state in the same manner, psychiatric institutions were also used to imprison and pathologise political activists in the USA at the same historical moment. See, for example, Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston, MA; Beacon Press, 2009).

³⁸ Jerome Bruner, 'Introduction' in Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, ed. and trans. by Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1962), pp. v-x, p. v.

as a solitary genius: ‘Vygotsky is an original’.³⁹ Bruner retroactively foists a brand of liberalism on Vygotsky, going so far as to claim that the Soviet psychologist’s work could be better understood as a theory of individualism than as an approach informed by Marxism:

To me, the striking fact is that given a pluralistic world where each comes to terms with the environment in his own style, Vygotsky's developmental theory is also a description of the many roads to individuality and freedom. It is in this sense, I think, that he transcends, as a theorist of the nature of man, the ideological rifts that divide our world so deeply today.⁴⁰

The translators of *Thought and Language* had, however, seen fit to cut large sections of Vygotsky’s text, including many of his references to Marx and Engels and all mentions of Lenin.⁴¹ They also declared that they chose to omit ‘polemical discussions that would be of little interest to the contemporary reader’.⁴² Bruner’s insistence on Vygotsky’s detachment from Soviet concerns is undermined by these editorial decisions. According to Graham, Luria and Vygotsky’s work though explicitly Marxist was influential in the West and was therefore distanced from its Soviet origins. Indeed, in obituaries that appeared in *The Times*, Luria is defined in opposition to a stereotyped image of the Soviet psychologist as a coldly mechanistic ‘rigid Pavlovian’. Luria is hailed for his concern for ‘the acting and suffering individual’; his work is said to exhibit an ‘ultimate concern with the human condition,’ at odds with mainstream Soviet practices.⁴³ Like Bruner’s discussion of Vygotsky, this implicitly casts Luria as a liberal individual adrift in a totalitarian society. In opposition to this tendency to downplay the ‘groundswells and storms’ from which Luria’s writings emerged, a tendency which has outlived the Cold War, it

³⁹ Bruner, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

⁴⁰ Bruner, ‘Introduction’, p. x. References to Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky have long been reinstated in English translations of Vygotsky’s work. Yet even in the 1987 introduction to Vygotsky’s *Collected Works*, also written by Bruner, although the American psychologist acknowledges Vygotsky’s association with an experimental artistic post-revolutionary milieu, he still insists, in a curiously anachronistic move, that the psychologist’s political ideals were closer to post-war ‘Western Marxism’ than to orthodox Marxist-Leninism. Jerome Bruner, ‘Prologue to the English Edition’ in *Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky*, vol. 1, ed. by Rober W. Rieber and Aaron S. Carter, trans. by Norris Minick (New York, NY; Plenum Press, 1987), pp. 1-16, p. 2.

⁴¹ The inaccuracies of this translation are well-documented, see, for example: D. J. Bakhurst, ‘Thought, Speech and the Genesis of Meaning’, *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 31, 2 (1986), 103-129 and Julia Gillen, ‘Versions of Vygotsky’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 28, 2 (2000), 183-198.

⁴² Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, p. xi.

⁴³ See, ‘Professor A. R. Luria’, September 5 1977, *The Times*, p. 14. See also, Oliver Zangwill, ‘Professor A. R. Luria’, September 9 1977, *The Times*, p. 16.

is the intention of this thesis to emphasise the distinctly Soviet aspects of Luria's work.⁴⁴

Luria was not alone in framing the October Revolution as a revolution in mental life. In *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, his seminal 1929 analysis of early Soviet life, René Fülöp-Miller declared:

What has been enacted in Russia is in truth more than a revolution in the ordinary meaning of the word: we have to deal with something more important than a mere modification of social and political conditions, or of the social position of a few classes of the population. The revolution has touched the ultimate problems of mankind. With unheard of boldness, an attempt is being made in Russia to make a correction in the archetype of humanity itself, to wipe out the former type of the lord of creation, that of the 'soul-encumbered individual creature', and to replace it by a 'higher type', by what is believed to be a new and more valuable species of living being, by the 'collective man', to replace the individual with the 'dividual'.⁴⁵

These lines recall the bombastic closing passages of Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924) with its call to create a new kind of human under communism, which found its ways on to the pages of Soviet psychology textbooks in the decade following the revolution. The American psychologist John Dewey similarly remarked when he visited the Soviet Union in 1928: 'It seems to me that the simplest and most helpful way to look at what is now going on in Russia, is to view it as an enormous psychological experiment in transforming the motives that inspire human conduct.'⁴⁶ The revolution set out to transform the world which would, it was hoped, precipitate a transformation of human consciousness.

⁴⁴ Far more attention has been paid to Vygotsky's intellectual milieu than to Luria's. As Bruner noted in a letter to the British educator Joan Simon: 'In all this Vygotskimania Luria is almost forgotten.' Letter from Jerome Bruner to Joan Simon, 26 January 1995. London, Institute of Education (IOE), Brian Simon Papers, DC/SIM/2/10. On Vygotsky see, for example, Alexei Kozulin, *Vygotsky: A Biography of Ideas* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1990) and René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1991), E. Zavershneva, 'Issledovanie rukopisi L.S. Vygotskogo "Istoricheskii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa"' [An investigation of the manuscript of L.S. Vygotsky's "Historical meaning of psychological crisis"], *Voprosy psikhologii*, 6 (2009), 119–137. On the international reception of Vygotsky's work, which in certain national contexts was explicitly championed by communist parties and organisations, see: Manolis Dafermos, 'Critical Reflection on the Reception of Vygotsky's Theory in the International Academic Communities' in *Cultural-Historical Approach: Educational Research in Different Contexts*, ed. by Bento Selau and Rafael Fonseca de Castro (Porto Alegre; Edipurcs, 2015), pp. 19-38.

⁴⁵ René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism: an Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia*, trans. by F.S. Flint and D.F. Tait (London; G.P. Putnam's, 1929), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World* (New York, NY; New Republic, 1929) p. 113. Richard S. Prawat speculates that Dewey met Vygotsky during this trip and identifies some intellectual connections between the two thinkers. See, Richard S. Prawat, 'Dewey

The revolution had an impact not only on individual psychological experience, but also influenced research agendas in the ‘psy’ disciplines. Luria’s work was explicitly addressed to the problem of the mutually transformative relationship between human consciousness and society. He thus contributed to revolutionary debates about human development; the Soviet ‘psy’ disciplines were not only shaped by history, but also participated in shaping it. Walter Benjamin likened the whole atmosphere of Moscow in 1927 to a laboratory, in which ‘no organism, no organisation’ was untouched by the experimental fervour.⁴⁷ Maria Gough’s *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*, quotes this passage in its opening paragraph. For Gough, whose work is focused on *avant garde* art practices, experimentation in the early Soviet period is ‘not a process sequestered in a laboratory, but rather pervades every aspect of everyday life.’⁴⁸ Constructivist artists did not intend to confine themselves to galleries, but hoped that radically transforming quotidian objects might transform human subjects in turn. In an essay in *LEF* (the journal of the Left Front of the Arts), discussed favourably by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* (1924), Nikolai Chuzhak proclaimed: ‘There are no more “temples” of art, or shrines, where the sacred absolutes of priests reside, shrouded in incense. There are workshops, factories, mills, and streets.’⁴⁹ In attempting to convey the revolutionary ‘atmosphere’ that Luria’s research was conceived in - the shifting textures and routines of everyday life [*byt*] that characterised the immediate post-revolutionary period - I have drawn inspiration from art historical, literary and cultural historical accounts. Histories of Soviet psychology tend to remain sequestered within laboratories, but Soviet psychologists were swept up in the revolutionary tumult with everything else.⁵⁰ Luria was an active participant in what

Meets the "Mozart of Psychology" in Moscow: The Untold Story’, *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 3(2000), 663-696.

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2., ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Others, (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 22-46, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Maria Gough’s *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press; 2005), p. 1.

⁴⁹ Nikolai Chuzhak, ‘Under the Banner of Life-Building (An Attempt to Understand the Art of Today)’ trans. by Christina Lodder, *Art in Translation*, 1, 1 (2009) 119–151, p. 143. Originally published in Russian in *Lef*, 1 (1923), 12–39.

⁵⁰ For overviews of Soviet psychology, see Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1952), David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1989), Alex Kozulin, *Psychology in Utopia: Toward a Social History of Soviet Psychology* (Boston, MA; MIT, 1984), John Mcleish, *Soviet Psychology: History, Theory,*

T.J. Clark has described as the 'buzz of voices, all rattled and contradictory' unleashed by the October Revolution, but he continued to participate in Soviet society long after the 'state started shouting through the revolution's mouth.'⁵¹

Luria's career began in the early years of the Soviet experiment, a moment of optimism and uncertainty, when the question of what a Marxist approach to psychological questions could and should be was still unsettled, but his career continued into the Stalinist period when the parameters of Soviet discourse began to narrow. Recent art historical scholarship has begun to redress a tendency in accounts of the Soviet *avant garde* to carve out a neat distinction between pre and post Stalin eras, which traditionally argued that the bold aesthetic experimentations of the former were replaced by a restrictive form of realism imposed from above.⁵² In a discussion of the painter Aleksandr Deineka whose stylistic approach shifted in accordance with state priorities, for example, Christina Kiaer argues that although the boundaries of debate did become increasingly circumscribed, artists continued to actively engage in aesthetic discussions rather than passively adopting officially ordained styles. She claims that the artworks produced in the 1930s can only be understood if it is acknowledged that Soviet artists were 'creators as well as victims.'⁵³ The state may have sought to muffle the contradictory voices buzzing in the wake of the revolution, but it would be a mistake to imagine the individuals engaged in producing artistic or scientific work in the Stalin-era as nothing more than ventriloquist's dummies. The process of attempting to make sense of Luria's engagements with Stalinism in the 1930s, retroactively complicated my understanding of his work during the 1920s: how to retain sympathy for Luria's project without ignoring the gap between dreams and reality that characterised

Content (London; Methuen, 1975), Joseph Wortis, *Soviet Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD; Williams and Wilkins, 1950).

⁵¹ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, p. 297.

⁵² See, particularly, Vladimir Papernyi, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002). A similarly stark periodisation informs Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989). This neat distinction between periods should also be understood in the context of a long Trotskyist historiographical tradition that sees the expulsion of the 'left opposition' in 1928 as the decisive turning point in Soviet history, for which Trotsky's own work laid the foundations.

⁵³ Christina Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s,' *Oxford Art Journal*, 28, 3 (2005), 323-34, p. 324.

Soviet life from the very beginning? This may be an uncomfortable endeavour, but is nonetheless necessary to penetrate the ‘atmosphere’ enveloping Luria’s work.

Luria’s career was influenced by shifts in state policy, both practically and theoretically. That the Soviet state had a major impact on Luria’s research is undeniable, but the meanings, extent and outcomes of that impact were constantly shifting. Luria’s career can only be comprehended if this ambivalence and volatility is acknowledged. In *Stalinist Science*, Nikolai Kremmentsov discusses the relationship between Soviet scientists and the state, declaring: ‘The *nomenklatura* system forced practically all Soviet scientists who occupied any administrative post to participate actively in ongoing ideological campaigns in order to maintain their high position.’⁵⁴ As we shall see, Luria was not immune from these campaigns and faced public criticism at various points during the Stalin era: he recanted his early interest in psychoanalysis, faced denunciation for being insufficiently interventionist in the 1930s, and narrowly avoided persecution in the anti-Semitic Doctor’s Plot in the early 1950s.⁵⁵ Almost immediately after Stalin’s death in 1953, however, Luria began to re-establish his international contacts.⁵⁶ In February 1958 he received a letter from the American Zionist writer Horace Kallen who had visited the psychologist in Moscow three decades earlier:

It is years since I have had a communication so welcome. You have been in our minds over and over again since 1929 and we had been wondering what had happened to you. To see your handwriting at the end of almost thirty years and to learn that you have been filling a Chair in Psychology in Moscow University is to experience something like a friend’s or a child’s rebirth.⁵⁷

Having fallen out of touch with Luria in the early 1930s, it is evident that Kallen, reading news of the Stalinist purges from afar, had feared the worst. At the height of the terror Luria had reason to fear the worst himself,⁵⁸ but to focus on this phase in

⁵⁴ Nikolai Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 258.

⁵⁵ These episodes are succinctly recounted in, Eugenia Kuzoleva and J.P. Das, ‘Some Facts from the Biography of A.R. Luria’, *Neuropsychology Review*, 9, 1 (1999), 53-56.

⁵⁶ On intellectual exchange across the iron curtain (and between Eastern bloc countries), see: Sarah Marks and Mat Savelli, ‘Communist Europe and Transnational Psychiatry’ in *Psychiatry in Communist Europe* (Houndmills; Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-26.

⁵⁷ Horace Kallen to Luria, February 20 1958. Cincinnati, OH, American Jewish Archives (AJA), Horace Kallen Papers, MS-1, Box 19, Folder 18.

⁵⁸ Not only was Luria’s work denounced in the 1930s but his sister, the wife of a People’s Commissar was arrested in 1937 and sent to a labour camp. However, their father, Roman Al’bertovich Luria, who worked as the Kremlin’s doctor, eventually intervened and she was sent into exile instead. See,

his career (and in Soviet history) would overlook the extent to which his work also benefited from the enormous prestige attached to science by the Soviet regime. Indeed, even in the 1930s, at the very moment his work was being publicly denounced, Luria was offered the opportunity to set up an independent institute in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov equipped with sixteen rooms, funded positions for fifteen co-workers and a budget of 100,000 roubles per year.⁵⁹ In 1951, shortly after the notorious ‘Pavlovian Session’ when all Soviet psychologists were forced to demonstrate their allegiance to Ivan Pavlov’s theorisations of conditioned reflexes, he was awarded the Order of Lenin, the USSR’s highest decoration.⁶⁰ In the post-war years he frequently travelled to international conferences in the West and lived for most of his adult life in a comfortable apartment in central Moscow. Although Luria relied on his colleagues abroad to supply him with commodities that were scarce in the USSR (including fountain pen cartridges, medicines and camera film), he also had access to luxuries unavailable to his foreign colleagues. Many of his most celebrated works, including his autobiography and case histories, were completed during long periods of relaxation at state-run rest houses situated on grand estates confiscated from the long-since exiled aristocracy.⁶¹ In his autobiography, Luria differentiated his career from his western contemporaries by contrasting their ‘comparatively quiet, slow-moving environment’ and ‘well-ordered, systematic education’ with his own chaotic experience in post-revolutionary Russia.⁶² By the time Luria was writing his memoirs in the 1970s, however, the society in which he lived was no longer in such dramatic flux. The tension between transformation and stability evident in Luria’s biography was also reflected in his research. Central to this thesis is the contradictory relationship between rupture and routine, between revolutionary transformation and the formation of the new norms and systems that came to characterise Soviet life.⁶³ Luria’s research, like much Soviet discourse, was

K.E. Levitin, ‘Luria’s Psychological Symphony’, *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 6, 36 (1998), 33-62, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁹ Luria to Wolfgang Köhler, March 6 1932, Philadelphia, PA, American Philosophical Society (APS), Wolfgang Köhler Papers, Mss.B.K815.

⁶⁰ Homskaya, p. 125.

⁶¹ See, for example, Luria to Bruner, December 20 1969 and Luria to Bruner, May 26 1976, HUA, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

⁶² Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 17.

⁶³ For a discussion of the ‘dialectic of permanence and transformation’ in Soviet thought considered in the longue durée, see: Galin Tihanov, ‘Continuities in the Soviet Period’ in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. by William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 311-339, p. 331.

structured around an ideal image of harmony; my intention is to understand that vision in relation to the cacophonous reality from which it emerged.

Inner Turmoil

‘Psychology is religion and the chief occupation of societies, such as those in the West, in which individual private souls are strictly separated from each other through an external legal and economic system of relations. In contrast, the Soviet state intervened directly in the souls of its subjects and manipulated their impressions, feelings and experiences.’⁶⁴ Boris Groys’s bombastic declaration asserts that psychology as a discipline was fundamentally incompatible with the Soviet system. Psychology, for Groys, necessarily relies on a conception of autonomous individuated subjectivity at odds with his understanding of Soviet experience in which the ‘territory of the psyche that was congruent with the territory of the state. In the Soviet era, private psychology was subordinated to official ideology and therefore was also nationalised.’⁶⁵ This thesis intends to trace a history of the Soviet ‘psy’ disciplines that challenges this characterisation. ‘Psy’ disciplines in the USSR were indeed subordinated to official ideology (although that by no means resulted in a single monolithic approach), but this thesis points to the continued incongruities evident on the pages of Luria’s publications between the psychic territories he attempted to navigate and the state-sanctioned maps he employed. Luria’s experiments brought him into contact with a broad range of Soviet citizens including industrial workers, convicted murderers, rural school children, deaf babies, Uzbek *kolkhoz* members, orphaned teenagers and brain-injured Red Army soldiers. His publications reveal that the responses of the people he encountered frequently failed to conform to his ideal frameworks for understanding individual development, indicating that Soviet experience was never identical with the official state narratives in the manner described by Groys.

Questions of agency and conceptualisations of self-hood are central to historiographical accounts of Soviet history, which often rely (however implicitly)

⁶⁴ Boris Groys, ‘Privatizations/Psychologizations’ in *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2010), pp. 57-68, p. 58.

⁶⁵ Groys, ‘Privatizations’, p. 59.

on assumptions about human psychology. But as Anna Krylova powerfully argues, historians' assumptions about subjectivity and human nature are no less culturally contingent than those of the historical actors they analyse.⁶⁶ This thesis, wary of making universalising claims about human conduct that might interfere with its analysis of historically situated 'psy' disciplines, therefore focuses on Luria's conceptualisations of subjectivity, agency and motivation, rather than attempting to portray him as an individual; as Luria noted in the conclusion to his autobiography: 'People come and go, but the creative sources of great historical events and the important ideas and deeds remain.'⁶⁷ Following Luria's assertion, this PhD deliberately eschews a detailed biographical account of his life and does not attempt to describe his temperament or emotional sensibilities. This approach is also designed to avoid hagiography. Moreover, pushing Alexander Luria the man into the background allows for the people he encountered in his research to come more clearly into view. This thesis is less interested in the 'extraordinary person'⁶⁸ behind the name embossed on the spine of Luria's books than in the often disenfranchised or marginalised Soviet people Luria and his collaborators sought to understand and, in some cases, treat.⁶⁹

Krylova persuasively claims that historians' conclusions about Soviet subjectivity might be understood in terms of their divergent interpretations of the relationship between the state and the individual, the official and the unofficial, the public and the private, the sincere and the cynical.⁷⁰ Based on the biographical

⁶⁶ See, Anna Krylova, 'The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies', *Kritika*, 1, 1 (2000), 119-146.

⁶⁷ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 188.

⁶⁸ Homskaia, p. 1.

⁶⁹ The people this approach risks ignoring are Luria's professional collaborators. It also downplays one of the most distinctive elements of Soviet psychology: the prominent role allotted to women. Collaboration is the main lens through which Anna Stetsenko has interpreted Luria and Vygotsky's working practices. See, for example, Anna Stetsenko and Ivan Arievidtch, 'Vygotskian Collaborative Project of Social Transformation: History, Politics, and Practice in Knowledge Construction', *The International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 12 4 (2004), 58-80. By zooming out to look at the broader historical context Luria's work developed in and by focusing attention on his patients at the expense of his colleagues it is my hope that my project compliments this existing scholarship and similarly avoids treating Luria as a solitary genius.

⁷⁰ Jochen Hellbeck similarly asserts: 'A division between inner striving and outward compliance no longer suffices to understand the self-transformative and self-awakening power of Soviet revolutionary ideology.' Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 11. Also part of this trend in post-Soviet scholarship on subjectivity, see Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2003).

details available, it would be possible to cast Luria as the victim of an oppressive regime, as a self-interested cynic consciously manipulating the official rhetoric to his own professional advantage or as a genuinely committed Marxist, who wilfully overlooked the flaws of the Soviet state.⁷¹ Such contradictions are evident both in Luria's published work and in his private correspondence. Regardless of his motivations, however, Luria conducted work within the Soviet system and elaborated a psychological theory consistent with, if not reducible to, Marxist-Leninist theory. In so doing he neither capitulated fully to external historical forces nor existed outside of them, but participated in forming history.

In the wide-ranging survey *Russian Psychology* (1989) David Joravsky discusses the contradictory position of Soviet psychologists, whose theoretical insistence on the need to create a 'New Soviet Person' was combined with the continuation, in practice, of psychological studies that enjoined patients to adjust to their existing social conditions. Joravsky takes Luria's career as 'the most revealing case in point' of this tendency.⁷² He claims that Luria's autobiography, though peppered with 'standard phrases' concerning revolutionary transformation, is characterised by 'reticence on distinctly Soviet issues', particularly the class backgrounds of the people he studied.⁷³ Joravsky charges Luria with glossing over clashes and conflicts to produce a smooth account written in a ritualistic, almost robotic style. Luria's career was, he says, defined by 'political caution, a scientist's effort to avoid ideological conflict, and a consequent retreat from field after field of research'.⁷⁴ Joravsky is not even convinced that Luria's work was couched in distinctly Marxist vocabulary, declaring that 'no characteristic ideas of Marx or Lenin can be discovered' on the pages of his works in any period.⁷⁵ This thesis will follow Joravsky in treating Luria as exemplary of the paradox of elaborating a Marxist psychology in the Soviet Union. Joravsky is certainly correct to accuse

⁷¹ In his analysis of the late Soviet period, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak powerfully challenges accounts of the Soviet experience that carve out a false binary between public utterance and private belief. Instead, Yurchak insists that the Soviet experience was characterised by paradox: fear, coercion and cynicism coexisted with a commitment to community, creativity and concern for the future. See, Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁷² David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1989), p. 246.

⁷³ Joravsky, *Russian Psychology*, p. 247.

⁷⁴ Joravsky, *Russian Psychology*, p. 248.

⁷⁵ David Joravsky, 'A Great Soviet Psychologist', *The New York Review of Books*, May 16 1974.

Luria of failing to attend closely to the environmental specificities his research proclaimed to address. Contra Joravsky's assessment, however, I contend that Luria did consistently frame his work in explicitly Marxist-Leninist terms throughout his long career. It is this paradox that makes Luria prototypically Soviet for this is the paradox of the Soviet project itself: egalitarian Marxist theory deployed to uphold and consolidate an oppressive social order.

Here I follow the example of Slavoj Žižek who has criticised the ways in which the composer Dmitri Shostakovich has been hailed in Western secondary literature as a closet heroic dissident who nobly smuggled criticisms of the Soviet regime into his symphonies. Žižek does not, however, conclude the inverse: that Shostakovich's work was the acoustic embodiment of communism. Indeed, as Žižek observes, the most disastrous thing imaginable for the Soviet state would have been if its citizens actually acted on the ideological tenets of Marxism. What made Shostakovich a prototypical Soviet composer was his 'inner distance towards the 'official' Socialist reading of his symphonies'.⁷⁶ Shostakovich's symphonies are contradictory: they contain an 'inner turmoil', which captures the tension between emancipation and oppression integral to the Soviet experience.⁷⁷ It is that turmoil that this thesis identifies in Luria's work. In treating Luria's career as exemplary of the paradoxes faced by those working within the Soviet system, I neither attempt to extricate an individual from an oppressive state apparatus nor declare the identity of those things, but hope to explore the entanglement of Luria's psychological work with Soviet history. In so doing I hope to demonstrate that situating Luria's theories in history complicates his project without invalidating it. Indeed, historicising his project is consistent with his overall aims. Luria stumbled when he allowed a particular vision of historical progress to take precedence over the historical processes observed by his research. Ultimately, however, historical events overwhelmed him, rendering that vision untenable and prompting him to develop a new mode of scientific writing.

⁷⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions on the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London; Verso, 2011), p. 125.

⁷⁷ Žižek, p. 125.

False Identity: Note on Method

‘There is as yet no critical theory of the neurosciences’, Martin Hartmann declares in his contribution to *Critical Neuroscience*.⁷⁸ Hartmann’s piece is the only essay in the collection which explicitly attempts to outline what such a theory might entail. He envisages an approach that would engage directly with contemporary neuroscientific research in order to lay bare its coercive aspects. In setting out this potential model, he draws primarily on the work of Jürgen Habermas who, he argues, built on the early foundations laid by Max Horkheimer in the 1930s but ‘dropped this Marxist frame’.⁷⁹ Unlike Hartmann and Habermas, this thesis holds on to Marxist frames, seeking to participate in the denaturalisation of the present, identified by Hartmann as a central element of critical theoretical approaches, through the rehistoricisation of Luria’s psychological and neuropsychological work.

My approach is primarily informed by the work of Luria’s non-Soviet contemporaries Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940).⁸⁰ As figures who shared a time with Luria but inhabited different spaces, Adorno and Benjamin’s writings both converge with and diverge from Luria’s in illuminating ways. For the purposes of this thesis, their understandings of dialectical development and critiques of progress provide a counterpoint to Luria’s more orthodox Marxist model.

In the programmatic essay ‘Traditional and and Critical Theory’ (1937), Max Horkheimer argues that traditional theory naturalises the social by imagining a world driven by alien external forces beyond the control of human agency. Such theory,

⁷⁸ Martin Hartmann, ‘Against First Nature: Critical Theory and Neuroscience’, *Critical Neuroscience*, pp. 67-84, p. 68.

⁷⁹ Hartmann, p. 71.

⁸⁰ Methodologically, this thesis is indebted to Esther Leslie’s work on the German chemical industry which frames Adorno and Benjamin as ‘narrators, meta-figures, points of illuminating light in the dense darkness of the real’, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (Harmondsworth; Reaktion, 2005) p. 21. I also took inspiration from Susan Buck-Morss’s Benjamin-inflected consideration of twentieth century utopianism: *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* and from Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth Century Germany* (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 2005). Theoretically, Rebecca Comay’s recent work proved hugely generative, particularly the insight that ‘the central paradox of psychoanalysis [...] also happens to be the essential paradox of the dialectic.’ Rebecca Comay, ‘Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 45 (2015), 237-266, p. 258.

Horkheimer claims, serves to uphold the existing political order: ‘The scholar and his science are incorporated into the apparatus of society; his achievements are a factor in the conservation and continuous renewal of the existing state of affairs, no matter what fine names he gives to what he does.’⁸¹ A critical theorist, on the other hand, is ‘wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members.’⁸² In the aphorism ‘Ego is id’ in *Minima Moralia* (1951), in an argument that recalls Horkheimer’s earlier attack on traditional theory, Adorno suggests that the discipline of psychology is structured to uphold the *status quo*, identifying the concomitant emergence of psychology with the ‘rise of the bourgeois individual’.⁸³ Adorno conceives of psychology as a discipline that is incorporated into the apparatus of society. Like the bourgeoisie, psychology, for Adorno, also has an oppressive dimension. Psychology, he claims, is premised on rationalisation; it elevates human subjects above all else but in so doing negates subjectivity and thus transforms human beings into ‘absolute object[s]’.⁸⁴ It therefore participates in the principles of human domination and exchangeability inherent in capitalist society. By treating the psychic life of suffering people as an interior space to be externally controlled, the logic of property ownership is replicated in the therapeutic encounter. Adorno attacks psychoanalysis specifically for its equation of healing with adjustment to the existing state of things. Patients are enjoined to align themselves with the reality principle, which only serves to uphold the alienation already immanent to capitalism.

In emphasising the relationship between human subjects and their historical circumstances, and by asserting that humans could actively intervene in history, Luria explicitly sought to differentiate his approach from the western ‘bourgeois’ traditions attacked by Horkheimer and Adorno. Ultimately, however, the affirmative relationship of psychology to existing reality identified by Horkheimer in traditional theory and Adorno in psychoanalysis was repeated in Luria’s project. Historical antagonisms were acknowledged by Luria in theory but, as we shall see, often disavowed in practice. This is not simply to state that Luria’s Marxist-Leninist

⁸¹ Max Horkheimer, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’ in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York, NY; Continuum, 1972), pp. 188-243, p. 196.

⁸² Horkheimer, p. 207.

⁸³ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London; Verso, 2005), p. 63.

theoretical model was incompatible with his oppressive social reality, but might be deployed elsewhere to different effect. Instead, attending to the historical situation in which he worked indicates that his model was always-already flawed, as it was premised on an assumption that both social and psychic antagonisms would ultimately and inevitably be resolved.

Adorno and Benjamin are included in a canon of ‘Western Marxist’ thinkers. Martin Jay defines Western Marxism as a diffuse and undogmatic group of intellectuals open to non-Marxist schools of thinking and often critical of official Communist Party positions. He frames Western Marxism as the ‘negation of its official Soviet (or Eastern) counterpart. The latter has been turned into a doctrinaire ideology of legitimation by a tyrannical regime, whereas Western Marxism, nowhere in power, had retained the libertarian, emancipatory hopes of the socialist tradition.’⁸⁵ In this thesis, Western Marxist thinkers function as antagonists to Soviet Marxism, acknowledging the violence and contradictions of history, without foregoing a revolutionary commitment to transforming the world. Žižek observes that the opposition of Western Marxist thinkers to Soviet Marxism was only infrequently made explicit, noting that thinkers of the Frankfurt School rarely engaged in any sustained manner with the phenomenon of Stalinism.⁸⁶ In drawing on Adorno and Benjamin’s work I do not intend to treat the Soviet Union as indistinguishable from the capitalist bourgeois societies that their critiques were primarily aimed at. It is my contention, however, that Luria’s research was structured around certain key assumptions, inherited from a western ‘bourgeois’ philosophical tradition, that Benjamin and Adorno rejected or challenged: he retained a faith in progress, affirmed the existing conditions in which he lived, and, mostly importantly for the purposes of this thesis, implicitly assumed that dialectical development was an immutable law of both history and nature (specifically the nature of individuals), which resolved in a final moment of reconciliation: communism (occasionally

⁸⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 63.

⁸⁵ Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1984), p. 2. In his canonical discussion of Western Marxism, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes Soviet Marxism as the substitution of a ‘simple schema of progress for the difficult reading of the anticipations and delays of history and for the rigorous examination of revolutionary society.’ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. by Joseph Bien (London; Heinemann, 1974), p. 71.

⁸⁶ Žižek, p. 92.

substituted for ‘civilization’) or adulthood respectively. The confrontation of Eastern Marxism with Western Marxism in this thesis could thus be understood as a confrontation between the comic and the tragic, between utopian optimism and utopian pessimism, between a positive and a negative dialectic.

In ‘Reconciliation Under Duress’ (1958), a rare example of an essay in which he explicitly attacked official Communist Party orthodoxy, Adorno articulated the paradoxical relationship between Marxist rhetoric and Soviet reality at stake in my discussion of Luria. The essay is a searing critique of the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács, who remained loyal to the Communist Party throughout the Stalin era. Adorno claims that ‘under the mantle of an ostensibly radical critique of society,’ Soviet Marxism had ‘degraded the philosophy it proclaimed to the level of a mere instrument in the service of its rule.’⁸⁷ According to Adorno, ‘officially licensed’ Marxists like Lukács proclaimed their work dialectical, while producing thoroughly undialectical texts, which denied the persistence of oppression in Soviet society.⁸⁸ Adorno insisted that in the Soviet Union the antagonisms and inequalities the revolution promised to sweep away continued but were disavowed by the officially-sanctioned rhetoric: ‘the cleavage, the antagonism persists, and it is a sheer lie to assert that it has been ‘overcome’, as they call it, in the states of the Eastern bloc.’⁸⁹ Here Adorno is not only stating that Lukács was mistaken to declare that Soviet socialism had achieved a moment of final reconciliation devoid of tensions; Adorno is suspicious of reconciliation as such. Luria’s psychological theories, like Lukács’s readings of literature, assumed that historical and individual development were moving forwards to a final moment devoid of antagonism. Adorno’s works challenge this assumption. In a 1964 lecture on psychology Adorno declared that a theory premised on the ‘false identity of subject and object in a world of radical discord [...] blinds [people] to the unreconciled nature of life.’⁹⁰ What Adorno would eventually term ‘negative dialectics’ is governed by the principle of non-identity. Unlike for Hegel (Marx, Lenin or Luria), for whom negativity constitutes one moment of a journey towards unity and completion (Absolute Knowledge,

⁸⁷ Theodor Adorno, ‘Reconciliation Under Duress’, *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Frederic Jameson (London; Verso, 2007), pp. 165-195, p. 166.

⁸⁸ Adorno, ‘Reconciliation...’, p. 166.

⁸⁹ Adorno, ‘Reconciliation...’, p. 195.

communism, consciousness or adulthood), for Adorno negation *is* dialectics; contradictions are never resolved. He focused on dialectical relations as they continually unfolded rather than setting his sights on a final moment of future synthesis.

Unlike Adorno, however, who dismissed Lukács out of hand for his engagement with Communist Party doctrine, my approach is more sympathetic to Luria's project. Adorno perceived, to borrow Susan Buck Morss's formulation, 'that actual past history was not identical to the concept of history (as rational progress).'⁹¹ In the case of the Soviet Union, however, he did not devote much energy to probing the implications of the tension between the two. This thesis attempts to examine the duress that Luria's rhetoric of reconciliation existed in relation to; it not only sets 'Eastern Marxism' against 'Western Marxism', but also frames Luria's work as a collision of historical materialism with the materials of history. By Horkheimer's definition, Luria was a traditional rather than a critical theorist. Horkheimer noted that '[t]he identification [...] of men of critical mind with their society is marked by tension, and the tension characterises all the concepts of the critical way of thinking.'⁹² Luria's work overwhelmingly attempted to present a vision in harmony with his society. It is my intention to read his work critically in order to reveal the tension that nonetheless persisted.

The third chapter of the thesis explicitly juxtaposes Luria's developmental psychological writings with Walter Benjamin's theories of childhood and reflections on his 1926-27 visit to Moscow. Elsewhere, Benjamin's work implicitly informs my approach to history. Benjamin declared that the historical materialist approaches the past in order to surprise the present. History writing for Benjamin is a political endeavour addressed to now:

[The] dialectical penetration and actualisation of former contexts puts the truth of all present action to the test. Or rather, it serves to ignite the explosive materials latent in what has been [...] To approach, in this way,

⁹⁰ Theodor Adorno 'Psychology' in *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge; Polity, 2006) p. 78.

⁹¹ Susan Buck Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (Hassocks, NJ; Harvester Press, 1977), p. 49.

⁹² Horkheimer, p. 208.

'what has been' means to treat it not historiographically, as heretofore, but politically, in political categories.⁹³

The historical materialist fans 'the spark of hope in the past', to provoke a bright but destructive conflagration in the present.⁹⁴ Though both dialecticians, Benjamin's explosive vision of history was very different from Luria's progressive model. Indeed, Benjamin's critique of progress was partially aimed at 'vulgar Marxism' (and hence at 'historical materialism' in the conventional Soviet sense), whose celebration of technology and industrial production 'recognises only the progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society.'⁹⁵ As Adorno observed, Benjamin's conception of history is 'just as heretical when looked at from the position of Marxist practice, as it is critical of traditional historicism.'⁹⁶ Benjamin noted, in a statement that recalls Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory, that 'the concept of progress bespeaks an uncritical hypostatisation rather than a critical interrogation.'⁹⁷ This thesis follows Benjamin in identifying the regressive aspects of Luria's progressive visions and similarly insists that digressions, deviations and detours are a generative and, indeed, necessary aspect of political transformation.

Paths of Development: Thesis Structure

Proceeding chronologically, my first three chapters discuss the two tumultuous decades following the October Revolution, with a closing chapter that considers the shattering impact of the Second World War on Luria's research. The opening chapters all follow a similar movement, discerning in Luria's publications an unresolved tension between the progressive frameworks that inform them and the fraught historical situation in which the people they describe lived, a context that can be glimpsed in the transcripts those publications include. These chapters observe in Luria's writings a dialogical relationship between his broad theoretical

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. and trans. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA; Belnap Press, 1999), p. 392.

⁹⁴ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389-399, p. 391.

⁹⁵ Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 393.

⁹⁶ Adorno 'Negative Universal History' in *History and Freedom*, pp. 89- 98, p. 90.

⁹⁷ Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 478.

pronouncements and the empirical data that accompanies them. The key texts that form the basis of this argument are *The Nature of Human Conflicts* (1932), *Cognitive Development* (based on research conducted in 1931 and 1932) and *Speech and Intellect among Rural, Urban and Homeless Children* (based on research conducted in the early 1920s). These works follow a similar format: they include descriptions of experiments undertaken, transcriptions of responses to the experiments, and general theoretical analyses and conclusions. They also each dedicate sections to the analysis of specific psychological ‘types’ that Luria defined in opposition to ‘advanced’ human consciousness (murderers, illiterate Central Asian women and uneducated street children respectively). Reading the transcripts those works contain I was struck that the responses Luria cites, which provide insights into the Soviet quotidian, often seemed to exceed or complicate his accompanying interpretations of the material. This PhD contends that it was only in Luria’s case histories *The Man with a Shattered World* (1972) and *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (1968) (discussed in the fourth chapter and coda) that he developed a form of scientific writing capable of fully attending to the utterances and experiences of the people he dedicated his career to observing, understanding and treating. These publications do not represent a shift in scientific practice so much as a shift in the stylistic presentation of his clinical material. Luria characterised this as a distinction between ‘classical’ and ‘romantic’ science. By taking a ‘romantic’ approach to Luria’s more ‘classical’ writings, I hope to discern moments in which ‘the wealth of living reality’ can be glimpsed through the cracks of his general and occasionally reductive schemas.⁹⁸

As its title indicates, Luria and Vygotsky’s *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, first published in the Soviet Union in 1930, explored three forms of related but distinct psychological development: evolutionary, cultural and individual.⁹⁹ Informed by the logic of Luria’s research, this thesis is similarly structured around discrete paths of development. An interest in tracing the progression from ‘lower’ to ‘higher’ forms of thought united Luria’s seemingly diverse strands of work. At the apex of his mountain of development stood the

⁹⁸ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 174.

‘civilized’, educated, healthy adult. Luria, however, had little to say about this advanced figure. He could only discern its outline, as though it stood silhouetted in front of the glaring sun. Instead, Luria proceeded from the base in order to explain the route to the peaks. The ideal person to whom Luria’s work is tacitly addressed could only be conceptualised in opposition to a cluster of figures who departed from that ideal. The analysis of apes, children, ‘primitive’ people and people with mental illnesses or disabilities characterised much early twentieth-century psychological investigation, and Luria engaged directly with these global trends. Yet unlike his peers in the West, his approach was informed by Marxist-Leninist ideas. Luria’s understanding of human development, like the Marxist-Leninist account of history, assumed that life followed a prescribed course with qualitative transformations occurring at given stages. Vygotsky claimed that their ‘reverse’ approach to psychology was methodologically analogous to Marx’s economic mode of analysis in *Capital*:

To understand the quitrent on the basis of the ground rent, the feudal form on the basis of the bourgeois form - this is the same methodological device used to comprehend and define thinking and rudiments of speech in animals on the basis of the mature thinking and speech of man.¹⁰⁰

The intention, for Marx, was to analyse highly developed bourgeois society in order to overthrow it. In contrast, Luria’s approach to the highest forms of human thought was affirmative. Luria was working in a post-revolutionary context in which the overthrow of capitalism had already been proclaimed; it is therefore ambiguous whether the ‘highest’ form he negatively described was an ideal communist subject located in the future or an already existing entity.

Luria’s writings contain two distinct understandings of history: sometimes history is understood as the environment enveloping the individual in the present, whereas at other moments he conceptualises individual development as an extrinsic miniature model which replicates the progressive development of history on a different scale. In an essay on the relationship between psychoanalysis and history,

⁹⁹ Lev Vygotsky and A.R. Luria, *Studies in the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Knox (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993), p. 36.

¹⁰⁰ Vygotsky, ‘The Historical Meaning of The Crisis in Psychology’, *The Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky*, vol. 3, ed. by Robert W. Rieber and Jeffrey Wollock, trans. by René van der Veer (Plenum Press, New York, 1997), pp. 233-343, p. 235.

Dominick LaCapra contends that it is inadequate for the historian of psychoanalysis to accept ‘the *analogy* between ontogeny and phylogeny or individual and society.’ Instead, he declares that ‘one must actively recognise that the analogy itself conceals the most basic interaction of psychoanalysis and sociocultural processes involving social individuals.’¹⁰¹ Similarly, the macrological historical framework that informed Luria’s work did not always map neatly onto his understanding of history as an individual’s immediate environment, life experiences and inherited culture. Luria treated human development as a recapitulation of both evolutionary and civilizational development, while simultaneously emphasising the contingent impact of contemporary experience on individuals. LaCapra notes in his discussion of Freud that ‘history in the ordinary sense often gets lost in the shuffle between ontogeny and phylogeny.’¹⁰² It is my hope that an analysis of Luria’s psychological theories and practices might provide a way of approaching the ‘basic interaction’ between his work and the society in which it was conducted, in order to bring history ‘in the ordinary sense’ into view.

In its treatment of Luria’s vast *oeuvre* my approach is intensive rather than extensive: each of my chapters began as an analysis of a single publication. Although the thesis moves chronologically and follows the overall arc of Luria’s career, it is not intended as a comprehensive overview of his life and work and says relatively little about the various institutions and disciplines with which he was involved. Instead, it focuses on four moments in his research that also correspond with pivotal moments in Soviet history, blasting ‘a specific life out of the era’, in the manner proposed by Benjamin.¹⁰³

This thesis starts at the very beginning: historically it begins with the 1917 October Revolution, which Luria also framed as the beginning of his own biographical journey. It also returns to the beginning of life itself. In 1925 Luria and Vygotsky co-wrote the introduction to the Russian translation of Sigmund Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Their short theoretical introduction, which stages the tensions between Marx and Freud that played out in post-revolutionary

¹⁰¹ Dominick LaCapra, ‘History and Psychoanalysis’, *Critical Inquiry*, 13, 2 (1987), 222-251, p. 242.

¹⁰² LaCapra, p. 222.

¹⁰³ Benjamin, ‘Theses...’ p. 396.

Russia, is the focus of my opening chapter. In Freud's seminal essay, he posited the existence of the death drive, which seeks to return to inorganic nature, an inanimate state prior to life. Despite Freud's insistence on the inherent conservatism of the organism, however, Luria and Vygotsky declared Freud's essay revolutionary and dialectical. **Chapter 1** focuses on their reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a basis for understanding their attempt to create a politically radical psychology. Like Adorno's work, Freud's essay, with its emphasis on negativity and the continual and transformative antagonism of opposing forces, challenges Luria's utopianism and thus provides a powerful counter-narrative to his psychological and political model. The propulsive relationship between life and death, assimilation and destruction, progression and retrogression that animates *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, informs the argument of this thesis as a whole. As a theory of non-identity, Freud's essay provides a counter meta-historical narrative to the Marxist-Leninist model espoused by Luria. The chapter concludes by discussing Luria's *The Nature of Human Conflicts*, based on experiments conducted concurrently with his engagement with psychoanalysis, which contains a wealth of clinical material based on his pioneering experiments designed to assess responses to emotional stimuli. By providing insights into the concrete (and frequently distressing) experiences of Soviet people *The Nature of Human Conflicts* undercuts the abstract utopian argument made by Luria and Vygotsky in their critique of Freud and demonstrates that Luria documented psychic conflicts, antagonisms and tensions in practice even when he sought to overcome them in theory.

In 1931 and 1932 Luria led two expeditions to Soviet Central Asia. Conducted during the period of the First Five Year Plan (1928-32), the experiments were conceived as an attempt to trace the cognitive effects of that state policy. Luria defined Uzbek society as culturally backward, but hoped to describe a process of psychic advancement, which he assumed would accompany the collectivisation of agriculture. As with his critique of psychoanalysis, this research affirmed progress. **Chapter 2** confronts Luria's engagement with the Stalinist project in order to examine whether his work replicated the oppressive tendencies of the society in which it was elaborated or whether its professed commitment to human liberation might have contained an emancipatory element.

As an icon of the future, the child was central to Soviet ideology. Untainted by the bourgeois past yet still dependent on adults, the question of how to create a properly revolutionary childhood was a paradox faced by Soviet psychologists and educators. **Chapter 3** contrasts Luria's work on developmental psychology, which sought to build the child in the image of an ideal adult, with the work of Walter Benjamin, who framed childhood perception as revolutionary and disruptive in its own right.

The Second World War marks a decisive turning point in this thesis. Benjamin did not survive the war. For Adorno, the combined catastrophes of Auschwitz and Hiroshima confirmed his bleak assumption that progressive understandings of history were inherently regressive. The 'Great Patriotic War', as it became known in the USSR, also had a decisive impact on Luria's life and work. My final chapter, which discusses Luria's work with brain-injured soldiers in the wake of the Second World War, argues that Luria was ultimately forced to contend with the unreconciled tensions occluded in his earlier work. In 1972 Luria published a case history of a patient he had been observing for nearly 30 years. *The Man with a Shattered World* tells the story of Zasetsky, a Red Army soldier in the Second World War who survived a bullet wound to his head. **Chapter 4** considers the formal qualities of the case history and proposes that its self-consciously literary style allowed Luria to present the cognitive condition of his wounded patient in all its complexity without abandoning a commitment to rehabilitation and healing. Although still couched in the Marxist-Leninist language that informed his earlier work, Luria here accepts that full recovery is impossible and thus attempts to ameliorate rather than overcome or deny psychic disorderliness and human suffering. *The Man with the Shattered World* demonstrates the limitations of a particular world-view in the face of a shattered world. This chapter treats Luria's case history as an allegory for the Soviet experiment, but also as a text that offers some political hope for the future. I identify an incursion of the negative in Luria's work which the pre-war research projects examined in the preceding chapters attempted to downplay. This thesis concludes by noting a moment when history violently smashed through the utopian framework Luria had erected over the human subjects his work sought to describe. It is at this moment, I will argue, that Luria finally proposed a critical

rather than traditional approach to psychology, or, in his own terms, a romantic rather than classical approach.

The PhD ends by returning to the immediate post-revolutionary period with which it began. The **Coda** considers the friendship Luria maintained with the Soviet film maker Sergei Eisenstein from the mid-1920s until the director's death in 1948. This concluding section follows the paths of their careers, discussing moments of convergence and divergence between Luria and Eisenstein in relation to the developmental movements around which this thesis is structured. It concludes with an analysis of Luria's case history *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, the protagonist of whom Eisenstein also engaged with, contending that, unlike Eisenstein, Luria might ultimately be considered a thinker of non-identity.

Chapter 1

The Unconscious: Between Life and Death

The Marxist method and the Marxist world-view form a unified system, but a system which, unlike others, never becomes rigid, but as a result of its dialectical method, is always dynamic within itself, always mobile and adapted to the constant movement and change taking place in nature and society.¹

Wilhelm Reich, 'Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union', 1929

This kind of teaching is the refusal of any system. It uncovers a thought in motion – nonetheless vulnerable to systematisation, since it necessarily possesses a dogmatic aspect. Freud's thought is the most perennially open to revision. It is a mistake to reduce it to a collection of hackneyed phrases. Each of his ideas possesses a vitality of its own. That is precisely what one calls the dialectic.²

Jacques Lacan, 'Overture to the Seminar', 1953

While not a single of the basic dialectical concepts has been revised or rejected by Soviet Marxism, the function of dialectic itself has undergone a significant change: it has been transformed from a mode of critical thought into a universal 'world-outlook' and universal method with rigidly fixed rules and regulations, and this transformation transforms the dialectic more thoroughly than any revision [...] As Marxist theory ceases to be the organon of revolutionary consciousness and practice and enters the superstructure of an established system of domination, the movement of dialectical thought is codified.³

Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*, 1971

¹ Wilhelm Reich, 'Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union', *Sex-Pol: Essays, 1929-1934* ed. by Lee Baxandall (London; Verso, 2012), pp. 75-90, pp. 78-79.

² Jacques Lacan, 'Overture to the Seminar', *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans by John Forrester (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 1.

³ Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1971), p. 115.

Introduction

In the *perestroika* era, discussions of Freudian ideas crept back into Soviet discourse for the first time since 1930, when psychoanalysis had been effectively banned and Freud pronounced *persona non grata*.⁴ Works by Western Marxists informed by Freudian ideas were translated and discussed, Freud's collected works were published in Russian 1989 and Freudian terminology entered the dissident arsenal of ideas deployed to critique the crumbling communist state.⁵ In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, archives opened and historians and theorists were quick to place Soviet history on the couch, diagnosing the collective repressions, societal Oedipal complexes and group neuroses generated and sustained by decades of authoritarian rule. As Martin A. Miller discusses in *Freud and the Bolsheviks* (1998), psychoanalysis 'as a methodology to interpret the past' played a crucial role in the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁶

Alexander Etkind's *Eros of the Impossible: History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*, which charts the Russian engagement with Freud in the early twentieth-century was first published in Russian in 1993. Etkind's book, Catherine Merridale notes, was an instant success in post-Communist Russia 'among a public eager for new information, controversy, and a fresh interpretation of Russia's long

⁴ For a concise overview of the criticisms psychoanalysis faced in the Soviet Union by a contemporary Leningrad-based psychologist, see: Elias Perepel, 'The Psychoanalytic Movement in U.S.S.R.', *Psychoanalytic Review*, 26 (1939), 298-300. On Soviet psychoanalysis see: Alberto Angelini, 'History of the Unconscious in Soviet Russia: From its Origins to the Fall of the Soviet Union', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 89 (2008), 369-388 and Gary N. Goldsmith, 'Between Certainty and Uncertainty: Observations on Psychoanalysis in Russia', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 47 (2002), 203-224.

⁵ The exploratory academic climate of late 1980s and early 1990s Moscow is vividly conveyed in the autobiographical final chapter of Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2000), pp. 214-278. She mentions Freud among a list of 'theorists formerly dismissed as "bourgeois" who had begun to be discussed in a series of underground seminars in 1987 (p. 218). See also, Viktor Mazin, 'The Meaning of Money: Russia, the Rouble, the Dollar and Psychoanalysis', *New Formations*, 72 (2011), 47-63. However, works hostile to psychoanalysis that reiterated well-rehearsed Soviet arguments continued to appear too. See, for example, M. S. Kel'ner and K. E. Tarasov, *Freudo-Markizizm o Cheloveke* (Moscow, Mysl', 1989), which is littered with familiar Lenin quotes and attacks on 'bourgeois ideology'.

⁶ Martin A. Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (New Haven, CA; Yale University Press, 1998), p. 167.

enslavement'.⁷ Etkind does not confine himself to narrating the historical path charted by psychoanalysis in the Russian context, but uses his discussion of psychoanalysis as the springboard for launching a bold attack on totalitarianism, the seeds of which he sees littered across the landscape of elite Russian culture. Etkind's polemical account places psychoanalysis centre-stage in a drama involving a Russian intelligentsia he characterises as power-hungry and erotically-obsessed, and whom he takes to embody the innate flaws of the Russian character. Like a psychoanalyst in the consulting room, Etkind is concerned with excavating the past in order to understand the neurotic present, but his diagnosis precedes his analysis. As such, he risks reducing history to a series of signposts all pointing in the direction of the gulag.⁸

'Psychoanalysis claims to transform the very status of the historian's object,'⁹ Jacques Derrida declares in *Archive Fever* (1995). Derrida argues that it would be not only 'impossible' but 'illegitimate' for historians of psychoanalysis to liberate themselves from Freudian discourse.¹⁰ For Derrida, psychoanalysis transforms history rendering exteriority untenable:

To want to speak about psychoanalysis, to claim to do the history of psychoanalysis from a purely apsychoanalytic point of view, purified of all psychoanalysis, to the point of believing one could erase the traces of any Freudian impression, this is as if one claimed the right to speak without knowing what one's speaking about, without even wanting to hear anything about it.¹¹

But psychoanalysis also exists in history and in post-revolutionary Russia it was never the dominant paradigm for understanding human development. In 'On Marx and Freud', an essay completed for the First International Symposium on the Unconscious in Tbilisi in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1979 and

⁷ Catherine Merridale, 'Revolutionaries on the Couch: Freudianism, Bolshevism and Collective Neurosis', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36, 2 (2001), 373-382, p. 374.

⁸ Similar assumptions also animate one of the few articles devoted to Luria's engagement with psychoanalysis, in which the author claims: 'Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union had to be repressed because the Soviet party leadership had to repress psychological truths concerning themselves.' Lewis S. Feuer, 'Freud's Ideas in the Soviet Setting: A Meeting with Aleksandr Luriiia', *Slavic Review*, 46, 1 (1987), 106-112, p. 108.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, 25, 2 (1995), 9-63, p. 37.

¹⁰ Derrida, 'Archive Fever', p. 25.

¹¹ Derrida, 'Archive Fever', p. 38.

'intended for a Soviet public',¹² Louis Althusser noted that one of the major affinities between Marxism and psychoanalysis is their antagonistic institutional development. The histories of both disciplines are characterised by 'implacable and inevitable dialectic';¹³ they exist in and through struggle, animated by a dialectical movement of constant 'attack-annexation-revision-scission'.¹⁴ The Soviet psychoanalytic community that emerged in the post-revolutionary period, contended with this process as both institutions were beginning to ossify into more rigid systems, albeit on very different scales.¹⁵ Although Soviet psychoanalysts were not alone in attempting to elaborate a Marxist approach to psychoanalysis,¹⁶ their state socialist context placed particular constraints on that project. Althusser noted that when adopting a psychoanalytic vocabulary 'one is obliged to use the currency reigning in the country one is exploring and no other'.¹⁷ However, in the Soviet Union the reigning currency was Marxism; it was thus psychoanalysis which needed to pass through the Bureau du Change.

Alexander Luria played prominent role in the short-lived Soviet psychoanalytic community. He established a Psychoanalytic Society in Kazan in 1921 and acted as secretary of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society in Moscow from 1923 to 1927, remaining a member until the society's activities came to a halt at the end of the decade. In 1932, Luria published a penitent article in which he distanced himself from his early interest in Freud. He criticised psychoanalysis in terms consistent with the prevailing discourse for being individualised, pessimistic and

¹² From a French introduction to the text published, cited in 'The Tbilisi Affair', Oliver Corpet and François Matheron ed., *Louis Althusser: Writings on Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (New York; Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 79-84, p. 83. Ultimately Althusser did not attend the event in Georgia, but his paper was included in the symposium's accompanying essay collection and was thus published in the USSR. See, A.S. Prangishvili, A.E. Sherozia, F.V. Bassin, ed., *Bessoznatel'noe: Priroda, Funktsii, Metody Issledovaniia* [*The Unconscious: Nature, Functions, Methods of Study*] (Tbilisi; Izdatel'stvo 'Metsnieriba', 1978), pp. 239-253.

¹³ Louis Althusser, 'On Marx and Freud', *Louis Althusser: Writings on Psychoanalysis*, pp. 105-124, p. 110.

¹⁴ Althusser, 'On Marx and Freud', p. 110.

¹⁵ On the professionalisation and institutionalisation of psychoanalysis, see: Sarah Winter, *Freud and the Institution of Psychoanalytic Knowledge* (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 121-208.

¹⁶ On the pre-war history of the Western European Freudian left see, Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Boston, MA; Beacon Press, 1975) and Paul A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left* (New York, NY; Harper Colophon Books, 1969), pp. 11-59.

¹⁷ Althusser, 'On Marx and Freud', p. 124.

irrational, and attacked Freud for straying from his clinical experiences.¹⁸ Mark Solms has argued that although Luria was forced by the caprices of the Stalinist regime to renounce his early affiliations with psychoanalysis, his work continued to be psychoanalytically oriented: ‘the apparent change in Luria's scientific direction initially amounted to little more than a change in *terminology*.’¹⁹ René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner similarly indicate that Luria retained an interest in psychoanalysis throughout his career despite the official silencing of the subject in the USSR.²⁰ However, although Luria’s article was certainly motivated by the oppressive political climate, it would be misleading to claim that his psychological approach was ever primarily psychoanalytic. His engagement with Freud, even at its most publicly laudatory, always combined psychoanalysis with other theoretical models and read it through a Marxist lens. The institutional development of Soviet psychoanalysis, its relation to the nascent communist state and Luria’s place within the movement is already well-documented. This chapter focuses less on the relationship that played out between Freud’s ideas and the Soviet political establishment than on the potential theoretical implications of Luria’s engagements with psychoanalysis for Marxist thought. Luria insisted that psychoanalysis was compatible with the goals of the revolution. This chapter will interrogate that claim through a discussion of Luria’s alignment of the Freudian death drive with the dialectic, and through a consideration of the relation of his theoretical arguments to the historical situation then unfolding in the Soviet Union.

In 1925, Luria co-wrote the introduction to the Russian translation of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with Lev Vygotsky. Luria and Vygotsky’s text stages the tensions between Marxist and Freudian conceptions of historical and individual development that arose when Soviet psychologists attempted to reconcile psychoanalysis with Bolshevik ideology. The grandiose themes of Freud’s seminal essay - which explores the relationship of the ontogenetic to the phylogenetic, the prehistoric to the contemporary, the organic to the inorganic - resonated with revolutionary concerns. Yet despite extolling Freud as a revolutionary thinker, the

¹⁸ A. Luria, ‘Krisis burzhuaznoi psikhologii,’ [‘The Crisis of Bourgeois Psychology’], *Psikhologiya*, 1-2 (1932), 63-88.

¹⁹ Mark Solms, ‘Freud, Luria and the Clinical Method,’ *Psychoanalysis and History*, 2 (2000), 76-109, p. 92.

essay strained to align psychoanalysis with Marxism. The authors hailed the dialectical qualities of the text but questioned how the ‘stormy progression of the historical process’ could be explained, if there exists, as Freud argued, an innate biological compulsion to return to an inanimate state.²¹ Luria and Vygotsky recognised that Freud’s theory ‘breaks with teleological concepts’ but the alternative model they proposed, informed by a Marxist-Leninist understanding of revolutionary change, paradoxically failed to retain the elements of Freud’s theory that they praised for being dialectical.²² This chapter, written in cognisance of what eventually befell the revolutionary project, asks whether a radical political project might draw on Freud’s insights, rather than rejecting them as Luria and Vygotsky did.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud first introduced the possibility of the existence of the death drive (*Todestriebe*), identifying ‘an urge inherent in organic life to restore an original state of things.’²³ Confronted with a profusion of patients shaken by traumatic dreams in the wake of the First World War, Freud had a theoretical as well as therapeutic problem. He had previously asserted that every dream is the fulfilment of a wish, but the unpleasurable repetition he encountered in traumatic dreams contradicted this claim. The death drive emerged from the violence of twentieth-century history. The First World War also precipitated the October Revolution. Like Eros or the life instincts, the Soviet project to transform the world was imagined as something propulsive, constructive and future-oriented but, in practice, this relentless forward motion was always haunted by the past and dependent on violence, a reality the state-sanctioned narrative disavowed. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate the limitations of Luria and Vygotsky’s reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but not with the intention of dismissing their utopian commitment to the possibility of creating a more equitable world. Instead, by situating their engagement with psychoanalysis in its stormy historical

²⁰ See, René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1991), p. 87.

²¹ Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky, ‘Introduction to the Russian translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*’ in René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner eds. *The Vygotsky Reader* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 10-18, p. 13. First published in Russian in Sigmund Freud, *Po tu storonu principa udovol'stviia* [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*] (Moscow; Sovremennye Problemy, 1925), pp. 3-16.

²² Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Introduction...’, p. 15.

context, I hope to prise open a space between meta-history and history to suggest that Freud's theorisation of the death drive might not have been as antithetical to communist political goals as Luria and Vygotsky argued.

Alexander Luria and the 'Disturbances in Russia'

Two months after the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd, Russian psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein wrote to her former analyst and lover Carl Jung from Moscow, where she had briefly returned from Vienna, outlining the difficulties involved in organising Russian psychoanalytic activities and translations: 'because of political events in Russia the ground is not ready for scientific matters.'²⁴ Seven years later, in his address to the Eighth International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Salzburg in April 1924, Ernest Jones declared: 'On account of the disturbances in Russia, it was extraordinarily difficult to collect data and to give a connected report of the progress of psychoanalysis in different parts of the country'.²⁵ But despite, and even partly because of the tumultuous political situation in Russia, an 'active, creative, and vigorous'²⁶ psychoanalytic community existed in the decade following the October Revolution of 1917, a community in which Luria played a major role.

In 1918, a year after the revolution, Luria entered Kazan University which, seven years later, would be renamed after its most famous alumnus: Lenin. Luria claims that his family, who were part of the city's Jewish intelligentsia, were 'sympathetic to the revolutionary movement [though] not directly involved in it'.²⁷ But indirect involvement with the revolution was inescapable: 'The Revolution freed us, especially the younger generation, to discuss new ideas, new philosophies and

²³ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 18*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey and others (London; Vintage, 2001), pp. 7-64, p. 36.

²⁴ Sabina Spielrein, Letter from Sabina Spielrein to Carl Jung, 4 December 1917 in Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*, trans. by Arno Pomerans, John Shepley and Krishna Winston (New York, NY; Parthenon Books, 1982), p. 57.

²⁵ Ernest Jones and Karl Abraham, 'Report of the Eighth International Psycho-Analytical Congress', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 5, (1924), 391-408, p. 405. In a letter to Freud, Karl Abraham noted how difficult it was for Russian psychoanalysts to attend the Congress due to the political situation. Letter from Karl Abraham to Sigmund Freud, April 26, 1924. See, *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1925*, ed. by Ernst Falzeder (London; Karnac, 2002), pp. 494-499, p. 498.

²⁶ Miller, p. xi.

new social systems [...] The content and the style of our lives changed almost immediately.’²⁸ The revolution dramatically interrupted routine existence; in its immediate aftermath food was scarce, money worthless, industry stagnant. 1918 was a tumultuous year in Luria's native city, a crucial strategic site in the ongoing Civil War in which Bolshevik victory was still far from assured. During the summer, the White Army occupied Kazan, forcing the Bolsheviks into retreat. Any Reds remaining were shot on sight. On September 10th, the Red Army stormed the city and the Whites fled across the Volga.²⁹ Leon Trotsky, who led the attack on Kazan, depicted that victory as a major turning point in the Civil War. The day after the Red Army's triumph, he delivered a rousing speech in the city's main theatre, declaring: 'We value science, culture, art, and want to make them accessible to the people, along with all their institutions – schools, universities, theatres and the rest [...] Precisely for that it was that we fought under the walls of Kazan.'³⁰ Even in the midst of war, academic and cultural pursuits were explicitly situated at the heart of the revolutionary project.

‘I began my career in the first years of the great Russian Revolution. This single, momentous event decisively influenced my life and that of everyone I knew’³¹ - Luria may not have taken up arms and thrown himself into the front lines of battle but he depicted his early academic career as being tied to the revolutionary moment, which had already begun to have a concrete impact on the cultural institutions mentioned by Trotsky.³² At Luria's university there were new admissions policies, shifts in curricula and changes of staff. Quotas that restricted the number of Jewish students permitted to attend university were abolished. Courses continued intermittently if not uninterruptedly. Professors unable to adapt to the demands of the

²⁷ Luria, *The Making of Mind: A Personal Account of Soviet Psychology*, Michael Cole and Sheila Cole eds. (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 18.

²⁸ Luria, *Making of Mind*, pp. 18-19.

²⁹ On Kazan's strategic importance in the Civil War see, Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (New York; Pegasus Books, 2005), p. 67 and W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York, NY; Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 187-193.

³⁰ Leon Trotsky, 'The Significance of the Taking of Kazan in the Course of the Civil War', *The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky, Vol 1, 1918: How the Revolution Armed*, trans. by Brian Pearce (London; New Park Publications, 1979), p. 332.

³¹ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 17.

³² On the revolution's impact on academic institutions see Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell, 1997). Loren Graham characterises the post-revolutionary period in scientific research institutions as being a 'curious

new regime often allowed students to lead discussions. Luria admitted to having ‘no idea of the real causes of the Revolution’ nor any knowledge of Marxist theory at this time. Instead he described the revolution as a vividly experienced yet nebulous ‘atmosphere’ of ‘general excitement’³³ – chaotic, hopeful, experimental. Kristin Ross's characterisation of Marx's understanding of the Paris Commune might be fruitfully applied here: the significance of the revolution was felt 'in its *displacement* of the political onto seemingly peripheral areas of everyday life – the organisation of space and time, changes in lived rhythms and social ambiances.’³⁴ Luria recalled:

My friends and I immediately threw our whole beings into the new movement because we recognised the opportunities that it offered. My enthusiasm came more from a strong emotional, romantic feeling toward the events of the time than from any deep intellectual appreciation of their social roots [...] Instead of cautiously groping for a foothold in life, we were suddenly faced with many opportunities for action- action that went far beyond our tiny circle of family and friends. The limits of our restricted, private world were broken down by the Revolution, and new vistas opened before us. We were swept up in a great historical movement.³⁵

Luria was drawn to utopian socialism and to discussions of ‘politics and the shape of the future society.’³⁶ In this lively and confused period of intellectual eclecticism Luria notes that he 'developed a lasting aversion to psychology'.³⁷ He found nothing 'alive' in the dry, academic works of Wilhelm Wundt, Hermann Ebbinghaus, Edward B. Titchener and other 'classical' Western European experimental psychologists: 'the boredom they inspired... is quite beyond fathoming.'³⁸ It was at this moment that he first encountered Freud, in whose writing he found an antidote to the 'lifeless, impersonal [...] boring, oppressive vacuous' forms of psychology that dominated the university's syllabus; Freud's work was equal to the vitality of the revolutionary moment. In 1922 Luria, then only 19 years old, organised a psychoanalytic discussion group in Kazan, writing to Freud personally to inform him that 'a new organisation had appeared in the world, the Kazan Psychoanalytic Circle.' Freud

amalgam of political control and popular ferment.' Loren Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 93.

³³ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 19.

³⁴ Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London; Verso, 2008), p. 33.

³⁵ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 19.

³⁶ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 20.

³⁷ K. E. Levitin 'A Criminal Investigation', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 36, 5 (1998), 46-75, p. 63.

³⁸ Levitin, 'Criminal Investigation', p. 63.

responded, addressing the young Russian enthusiast as 'Herr President', and authorising Luria to translate his work into Russian.³⁹

The Kazan Psychoanalytic Society was thus founded, with Luria acting as secretary. Luria's report in the *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association* from 1923 lists twenty two members, mostly medical practitioners and students, who 'interest themselves in the theoretical problems of psychoanalysis and in its application to the mental and social sciences as well as to therapeutics.'⁴⁰ The group met at least twice a month in its first year. Discussions included analyses of specific cases, dream interpretations, the relationship of psychoanalysis to other psychological schools, and summaries of specific works by Freud (including 'On Narcissism' and 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego').

Luria's talks primarily functioned to situate psychoanalysis within the broader discipline of psychology in Russia, including discussions of reflexology and neurology. He presented only one explicitly psychoanalytic paper entitled 'The Psychoanalysis of Costume', which focused on the symbolic function of gender difference in dress. The abstract included in the bulletin indicates that he analysed women's costumes in carnivals and dances, and men's in armies and revolutions as 'symptoms' of gender difference: 'the dress of women are of a sexual-passive nature, but in man the motives are sexual[ly] (and social[ly]) active.'⁴¹ Interestingly, Luria's emphasis on essential gender difference and the 'primitive motives' underlying social rituals is in marked contrast to his later engagements with psychoanalysis, which, as we shall see, tended to emphasise the changeability of human nature and the historical contingency of cultural forms, perhaps an indication of how swiftly the newly minted Marxist-Leninist vocabulary began to circulate.⁴²

Although Luria found Freud's writing inspiring, he was reading him

³⁹ Levitin, 'Criminal Investigation', pp. 62-65.

⁴⁰ Luria, 'The Kazan Psycho-Analytical Society, Russia', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 4 (1923), 397-399, p. 397.

⁴¹ Luria, 'Kazan', p. 397.

⁴² Luria, 'Kazan', p. 397. Luria's argument was also out of synch with discussions of gender difference and the liberation of women prevalent in early Bolshevik discourse. See, for example, E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 1978).

alongside an eclectic array of other authors, not only psychologists but neo-Kantian philosophers, anarchists, historians and poets. Luria presented psychoanalysis as one approach among many devoted to 'the analysis of personality (as a whole)'.⁴³ The Kazan Psychoanalytic Society declared an interest in combining psychoanalytic techniques with other approaches; it was far from uncritical of the psychoanalytic method. At a meeting on November 23rd 1922, for example, doubts were raised as to the applicability of psychoanalytic categories to literature and folklore. Another debate focused on childhood sexuality and the question was raised in discussing Freud's 'Group Psychology' whether sexuality was an appropriate paradigm for considering collective dynamics, a question of particular urgency in the nascent Soviet Union.⁴⁴

Luria held a position as a typographer at this time, which allowed him to print and disseminate his early writings. Paper was a scarce resource in post-revolutionary Russia and Luria resorted to printing some of his works on the discarded wrappings from a local soap factory.⁴⁵ As well as various journals and reviews, he undertook to print and bind a single copy of a small book he had written entitled *Psychoanalysis in Light of the Main Trends in Modern Psychology*. In 1923, Luria met Otto Schmidt whose wife Vera had trained as a psychoanalyst in Vienna. Otto, an archetypal Soviet polymath was a mathematics professor, a celebrated polar explorer, and also worked as director of the State Publishing House. He arranged for a short print run of Luria's book to appear. An Institute for Psychoanalysis had opened in Moscow in 1921, making the Soviet capital the first place outside of Vienna and Berlin where it was possible to train as a psychoanalyst. Luria and some of his colleagues from Kazan were subsequently invited to merge with the Moscow society to form the Russian Psychoanalytic Society.

History and its Vicissitudes: Psychoanalysis in NEP-era Moscow

Luria moved to Moscow in 1923 where he became Scientific Secretary of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society. Enthusiasm for psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union

⁴³ Luria, 'Kazan', p. 397.

⁴⁴ Luria, 'Kazan', p. 399.

⁴⁵ Levintin, 'A Criminal Investigation', p. 68.

in the early 1920s was not merely tolerated by the fledgling communist government but, as both Etkind and Miller's secondary accounts of the history of Soviet psychoanalysis discuss in detail, actively engaged with by 'the highest echelons of power'.⁴⁶ Although Luria himself was not to join the Communist Party until the 1940s, the leadership of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society in the 1920s consisted almost entirely of Bolsheviks, many of whom were 'enchanted by the possibilities thrown open for the scientific transformation of life'.⁴⁷ Psychoanalysis was vigorously debated in prominent Bolshevik journals and extensive translations of Freud and other psychoanalysts were published by the state-funded press. In 1923, 2000 copies of Freud's *Introductory Lectures* were sold in Russia.⁴⁸ As Miller states, 'no government was ever responsible for supporting psychoanalysis to such an extent, before or after.'⁴⁹ Members of the Trotskyist 'left opposition' were particularly prominent in the psychoanalytic community and Etkind suggests that the demise of the psychoanalytic community in Russia may not be unrelated to the expulsion of the left opposition in 1928.⁵⁰ State level support for psychoanalysis certainly did not spell a wholesale acceptance of Freud's ideas, however, which were frequently vehemently criticised and psychoanalysis was far from dominant in the psychological community.⁵¹ Instead, this brief episode demonstrates the heterogeneity of early Soviet psychology, the prevailing atmosphere of experimentation that followed in the revolution's wake and the proximity of the Bolshevik elite to Western European intellectual debates.

On 26th October 1932, when the collectivisation of agriculture was underway and Freud's ideas were no longer officially in circulation in Russia, a meeting of writers was convened at the home of Maxim Gorky in Moscow to discuss the fate of Soviet literature at which Stalin is famously said to have raised his glass to writers,

⁴⁶ Etkind, p. 202.

⁴⁷ Etkind, p. 242.

⁴⁸ 'The Psychoanalytic Movement, Russia', *Bulletin of the International Psychoanalytic Association*, 4 (1923) 522-525, p. 522.

⁴⁹ Miller, p. 68.

⁵⁰ See, Etkind, pp. 230-243.

⁵¹ For a representative selection of essays from the period both defending and attacking psychoanalysis, see: *Zigmund Freid: Psikhoanaliz i russkaia mysl'* [*Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalysis and Russian Thought*] ed. by V. M. Leibin (Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Respublika', 1994), pp. 145-372.

‘the engineers of human souls.’⁵² The house in which this meeting took place had previously been the site of a very different experiment in human psychology. The Russian Psychoanalytic Society took up residence in this grand residential building in 1921, a recently constructed art nouveau mansion confiscated from the industrialist Stefan Riabushinsky, later assigned to Gorky (whose museum the building still houses today). The building's shifting function provides an insight into the vicissitudes of Russian history: the psychoanalytic society occupied the space during the period of the New Economic Policy or NEP (1922-1928), in the confused interval between mercantile capitalism and Stalinism.

In the aftermath of the revolution, the state expropriation and re-purposing of buildings was common-place: churches became living spaces, banks became scientific institutes, synagogues became workers' clubs, nightclubs became film studios. The statues on imperial pedestals were swiftly replaced with improvised models of revolutionary figures; streets and squares were renamed; housing reallocated. Luria later recalled with a hint of irony that even the most mundane spatial re-configurations seemed to herald a dramatic re-configuration of daily existence [*byt*]: ‘we moved the furniture around [...] and I remember quite well how I myself was convinced, as I dragged chairs up the stairs, that we were actually reorganising our work and creating a new foundation for Soviet psychology.’⁵³ At the Psychoanalytic Society, Luria's 'splendid office, with silk wallpaper', where he chaired the group's bi-weekly meetings, was on the first floor.⁵⁴ On the ground floor Vera Schmidt ran a psychoanalytic children's home called 'International Solidarity'.

The building, completed in 1906, was designed to imitate nature. Mosaics, murals and stained glass windows depicted reptiles, flowers and dragonflies, while ceilings, floors and banisters were designed to look like stalactites, pond surfaces, branches and lichen.⁵⁵ The architecture also incorporated motifs of traditional Russian church architecture (Plate 1.1). One student recalled feeling tiny and out of

⁵² The phrase is sometimes attributed to Yuri Olesha and was subsequently repeated in speeches at the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934. See, A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-1939* (Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), pp. 128-31.

⁵³ Levitin, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Levitin, p. 73.

⁵⁵ William Craft Brumfield, *The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1991), pp.133-139.

place in such salubrious surroundings.⁵⁶ The lavish decor of the building was at odds with the material hardship of the period and its organic and religious elements out of synch with the prevalent images of the socialist future as industrialised, automated and secular.

Like the grand bourgeois building that housed it, the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society also evinced an interest in nature and origins at odds with the dominant political discourse.⁵⁷ Despite the building's citations of natural and religious history, however, it was nonetheless emphatically modernist in style: 'in this single architectural space, experimentation, mythology and ritual existed side by side.'⁵⁸ These contradictory qualities of the building, which looked simultaneously to the past and the future, were shared by the Psychoanalytic Society, which attempted to combine the future-oriented momentum of Marxism with a Freudian approach that emphasised the existence of unchanging biological instincts. As the emphatically Marxist name of Schmidt's children's home indicates, the Russian Psychoanalytic Society adopted a hybrid approach to Freudian theory suited to its Soviet context. The kindergarten's ideological name was adopted in acknowledgment of its benefactors: threatened with closure in 1922 after the People's Commissariat for Education expressed concern that the institution encouraged inappropriate childhood sexual expression, a visiting representative from the German Miner's Union stepped in to provide 'material assistance and ideological support' to the institution.⁵⁹ The name was not completely alien to the institution's goals, however. Schmidt explicitly situated the activities and approach taken by the children's home in its revolutionary context: 'The interest for educational issues, particularly for community education [...] increased significantly during the events of the last few years in Russia.'⁶⁰ In addition to the children's home, the Russian Psychoanalytic Society also included a

⁵⁶ N. L. Penezhko, V. N. Chernukhina and A. M. Marchenkov, *6 Riabushinsky Gorku – Dom Na Maloy Nikitkoy, 6* [*6 Riabushinsky Gorky – The House at 6 Mal. Nikitskaia*], (Moscow, Nasledie, 1997), p. 74.

⁵⁷ The society prioritised work with children and thus placed an emphasis on the origins of life. Vera Schmidt also conducted an investigation into 'children's questions about the origin of human beings'. Alexander Luria and Vera Schmidt, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 8 (1927), 454-455, p. 454.

⁵⁸ James L. West, *Riabushinsky's Utopian Capitalism' in Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 165.

⁵⁹ Vera Schmidt, *Psychoanalytische Erziehung in Sowjetrussland: Bericht über das Kinderheim-Laboratorium in Moskau* [*Psychoanalytic Education in Soviet Russia: Report on the Children's Home-Laboratory in Moscow*] (Leipzig; Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924), p. 5.

training programme, an outpatient clinic, and a publishing arm. A 1924 bulletin lists the Society's 'various sections dealing with medicine, education, sociology, and analysis as applied to art.'⁶¹ The analyst-analysand dyad was never central to Russian psychoanalytic practice.⁶² Schmidt claimed that the lack of trained psychoanalysts in Moscow forced them to improvise⁶³, but it was also politically significant that the activities carried out by the society emphasised group activities over individual therapeutic sessions and the analysis of children over the analysis of adults.⁶⁴

Luria himself never trained as a psychoanalyst, carrying out his administrative duties as secretary alongside a full-time research position at the Moscow Institute of Psychology. The topics of his lectures at the society indicate that he incorporated psychoanalytic approaches with discussions of conditioned reflexes and motor reactions (which, as we shall see, dominated his research at his day job).⁶⁵ On March 26th 1925, for instance, Luria delivered a paper on 'Affect as an Unabreacted Reaction', which combined a discussion of Freud's theories of sexual inhibition with observations on Ivan Pavlov's experiments with dogs.⁶⁶

Despite its evident eclecticism, the idiosyncratic approach to psychoanalysis taken in Soviet Russia was followed with interest by clinicians in Vienna. In October 1923 the Schmidts returned to Moscow from Vienna where they reported that Freud, Otto Rank and Karl Abraham had given useful advice on running the children's

⁶⁰ Schmidt, *Psychoanalytische...*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Luria, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 5 (1924), 258-261, p. 258.

⁶² None of the bulletins detailing the Psychoanalytic Society's activities make reference to psychoanalytic therapy being conducted. Etkind claims that only three members of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society conducted analytic sessions and that this was a marginal activity. See, Etkind, p. 192.

⁶³ Schmidt, *Psychoanalytische...*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ This approach not completely out of kilter with psychoanalytic communities elsewhere in the period. The first post-war analytic conference was hosted in September 1918 in Budapest at the invitation of Béla Kun's Communist government where a resolution was adopted to encourage 'mass' publicly financed therapy. As Eli Zaretsky states in *Secrets of the Soul*: 'European analysis had a socially oriented cast throughout the twenties and thirties.' Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY; Alfred A Knopf, 2004), p. 127. See also, Elizabeth Ann Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice, 1918-1938* (New York, NY; Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ On Luria's work with Kornilov at the Moscow Institute of Psychology and its relation to his psychoanalytic work, see: Kozulin, pp. 86-89.

home: 'In particular, the question of collective education and psycho-analysis (the fate of the Oedipus complex under conditions of collective education) was discussed.'⁶⁷ The psychoanalytic establishment may have been open to the novel experiments occurring in Moscow but meanwhile the Soviet establishment was growing increasingly hostile to Freudian thought. The question of the incompatibility of psychoanalysis with Marxism refused to disappear. In 1926, a paper was presented to the Russian Psychoanalytic Society which asked: 'Does psychoanalysis contradict dialectic [*sic*] materialism?'⁶⁸ We can only speculate what answer the speaker gave to this question, but Soviet writers were increasingly publishing texts which unequivocally answered in the affirmative.

Luria's characterisation of the immediate post-revolutionary period as a period of chaotic hopefulness agrees with the image of feverish optimism described by Richard Stites in *Revolutionary Dreams* (1989). Stites discusses the wild proliferation of utopian visions that burst forth following the October Revolution, celebrating the diversity of these hopeful, often eccentric experiments; their spontaneity, their 'blazing colour',⁶⁹ and their penetration into all corners of material and mental life. Despite the incredibly bleak conditions of the present, people across the huge expanse of the new Soviet Union were looking forward, in a rich variety of ways, to what the future might become. Stites defines the period from 1917-1930 as

one of those rare moments in history when a large number of people actually try to break the mould of social thinking that sets limits to mankind's aspirations, that defines 'human nature' in a certain unchangeable way, that speaks in realistic, prudent and ultimately pessimistic tones to the enthusiasts of the world in order to curb their energies and their fantasies.⁷⁰

Stites not only conveys the hectic buoyancy of post-revolutionary Russia, he wholeheartedly embraces it. However, his narrative, which ends abruptly in 1930, draws a neat distinction between the pluralistic experimentation of the 1920s and the 'savage

⁶⁶ Luria, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 7 (1926), 294-295, p. 294.

⁶⁷ Luria, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society,' *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 5 (1924), 258-261, p. 260.

⁶⁸ Alexander Luria and Vera Schmidt, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 8 (1927), 454-455, p. 454.

⁶⁹ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Stites, p. 252.

butchery' of the Stalin-era.⁷¹ Although in one sense the Soviet engagement with psychoanalysis, which also ended in 1930,⁷² fits with Stites's periodisation, the content of psychoanalytic debates complicates Stites's argument because discussions of Freud in the post-revolutionary period grappled with the problems that Stites presents as the revolution's most laudatory attributes. Enthusiasts of the world were forced to contend with the possibility that human nature might not be as changeable as they would like, and to consider the potential dangers of unleashing energies and fantasies. The 'relative laxity' of the period may have enabled the public discussion of psychoanalytic ideas, but those discussions frequently challenged rather than embraced the utopian ideas that form the basis of *Revolutionary Dreams*.⁷³ Freud noted of the Soviet project in his 1933 lecture 'On the Question of a *Weltanschauung*':

It hopes that in the course of a few generations so to alter human nature that people will live together almost without friction in the new order of society, and that they will undertake the duties of work without compulsion. Meanwhile it shifts elsewhere the instinctual restrictions that are essential in society; it diverts the aggressive tendencies which threaten all human communities to the outside [...] But a transformation of human nature such as this is highly improbable.⁷⁴

Luria rejected Freud's insistence on the eternal and primitive elements of the unconscious as incompatible with revolutionary politics, but in so doing he also dispensed with the psychoanalytic emphasis on the necessary existence of opposing drives within human life, elements that may not have been as incompatible with a revolutionary future as Luria assumed.

Alexander Luria, Lev Vygotsky and the Identity of Opposites

In the decade immediately following the October Revolution what a Marxist science or psychology would entail was fiercely debated, and a range of conflicting

⁷¹ Stites, p. 225.

⁷² 'The psychoanalytic movement slowed down, and about the year 1930 came to a standstill. From this date it officially ceased to exist, and all publication of its work ceased likewise.' Perepel, p. 300. See also, Miller, p. 101.

⁷³ Stites, p. 225.

⁷⁴ Freud, 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' in *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, (London; Vintage, 2001), pp. 158-184, p. 179.

approaches developed.⁷⁵ As Joseph Wortis notes in an overview of the heated debates in Soviet psychology that followed in the revolution's wake:

The Soviet Union is sometimes depicted as a monolithic giant permanently embedded in fixed Marxian dogma. A reading of Soviet psychiatric literature, however, does not convey the impression of a rigid application of fixed formulas. The tempo of change and development, the periods of trial and error, the reversals of policy and the constant atmosphere of experiment and growth are nowhere more apparent than in the fields of Soviet psychology and psychiatry.⁷⁶

Yet despite the liveliness and occasional vehemence of the discussions, the 1920s saw the gradual emergence of a 'new lexicon and a new polemical style' which clustered around a common core of ideas and thinkers.⁷⁷ As Loren Graham states: 'No other revolution in history contained a radical epistemological and cognitive system to the same degree.'⁷⁸ Luria's Marxist vocabulary should be understood in this context. Luria admitted that he was unfamiliar with the writings of Marx and Engels at the time of the revolution.⁷⁹ As such, it seems that the understanding of dialectics he adopted was drawn from Soviet discursive formations, which still fluttered like snow around him but were beginning to settle. Luria and Vygotsky's Introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was published in 1925, the same year as V.I. Lenin's *Conspectus of Hegel's Book 'The Science of Logic'* and Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, which went on to function as programmatic definitions of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ In Lenin's notes he states:

Cognition is the eternal, endless approximation of thought to the object. The reflection of nature in man's thought must be understood not 'lifelessly', not 'abstractly', not devoid of movement, not without contradictions, but in the eternal process of movement, the arising of contradictions *and their solution*.⁸¹

⁷⁵ It was only following the onset of the First Five Year Plan in 1928 that the Soviet state began to demand that scientists publicly demonstrate unequivocal support for the regime. See, John Barber, 'The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy in the USSR, 1928-1934' *Past and Present*, 83 (1979), 192-253. However, in the discipline of psychology fierce ideologically-charged arguments had already begun to rage in the 1920s.

⁷⁶ Joseph Wortis, *Soviet Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD; Williams and Wilkins Co, 1950), pp. x-xi.

⁷⁷ Nikolai Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 23.

⁷⁸ Loren Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 99.

⁷⁹ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Roy Bhaskar observes: 'it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Engels' more cosmological cast of materialism... as the doctrinal core of what subsequently became known as dialectical materialism'. Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (Verso; London, 1989), p. 128.

⁸¹ V.I. Lenin, 'Conspectus on Hegel's Book The Science of Logic', *Collected Works, Vol. 38, Philosophical Notebooks* (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), pp. 85-244, p. 195 (my emphasis).

Lenin insists that dynamism, contradiction and breaks in continuity are integral to dialectical thinking which is always ‘living, conditional, mobile.’⁸² But this movement and conflict is ultimately not eternal or endless at all: the dialectic, like the sentence quoted above, ends with a solution. Lenin draws attention to the closing of Hegel’s *Logic* which resolves in ‘absolute unity’.⁸³ He declares: ‘Dialectics is the teaching which shows how Opposites can be and how they happen to be (how they become) identical.’⁸⁴ For Lenin, dialectical contradiction has an end point: communism.

Luria’s early writings are littered with phrases and concepts drawn from the emerging Soviet vernacular. In 1924 Luria delivered a speech at the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society. The resulting paper ‘Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology’ was later included in K. K. Kornilov’s collection *Psychology and Marxism*. Here Luria argues for the compatibility of psychoanalysis with Marxism. He declares that psychology should treat its object, ‘as something constantly changing, ceaselessly in movement’.⁸⁵ This movement he insists does not proceed evenly or in one direction but ‘sometimes experiences leaps, breaks, discontinuities, as it were, and most often unfolds in a series of shifts or swings from one extreme to the other rather than proceeding uninterruptedly.’⁸⁶ This progression might be characterised by flux, might advance jerkily, might encounter obstacles along the way, but it still advances inexorably forwards and will eventually reach its final destination where contradictions dissolve. In V. N. Voloshinov’s 1927 critical tract *Freudianism: A Critical Essay* (a text some scholars now attribute to Mikhail Bakhtin),⁸⁷ Voloshinov differentiates psychoanalysis from previous psychological schools for its understanding of human development:

Lenin is reported to have dismissed psychoanalysis as ‘bourgeois’ for its emphasis on sexuality. See, Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (London; Modern Books Ltd, 1929), pp. 52-53.

⁸² Lenin, ‘Conspectus’, p. 109.

⁸³ Lenin, ‘Conspectus’, p. 234.

⁸⁴ Lenin, ‘Conspectus’, p. 109.

⁸⁵ A.R. Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology’, *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 40, 1 (2002), 26–53, p. 28. Originally published in K.K. Kornilov, *Psikhologiya i Marksizma [Psychology and Marxism]* (Leningrad; Gosudarstvenoe psikhologii, 1925), pp. 47-80.

⁸⁶ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 28.

⁸⁷ On Bakhtin’s alleged authorship of the text see, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 171-185.

Mental life for the old psychologies was all “peace and quiet”: everything put right, everything in its place, no crises, no catastrophes; from birth to death a smooth, straight path of steady and purposive progress, of gradual mental growth, with the adult's consciousness of mind coming to replace the child's innocence. This naïve psychological optimism is a characteristic of all pre-Freudian psychology.⁸⁸

Luria was far less critical of Freud than Voloshinov, but ironically his work displays many of the traits Voloshinov denigratingly associates with pre-psychoanalytic Western bourgeois psychology. In Luria's paper, although crises and catastrophes dot the road, development never veers off course. The cumulative and constant progression that Voloshinov praises psychoanalysis for combatting persists in Luria's writing, which similarly betrays an optimistic faith that life will proceed purposively and eventually reach a peaceful resolution. However, Luria's insistence on the final identity of opposites and the possibility of overcoming the past was difficult to reconcile with psychoanalysis.

As the title of his speech indicates, even when discussing psychoanalysis directly, Luria's terminology remained firmly within the parameters of Soviet discourse. By ‘monistic’ Luria intends to express that psychoanalysis does not isolate the psyche from the human body, its activities and its environment, but considers human mental life as one aspect in a complex, dynamic, material system. Here again, he is close to Lenin, who defined ‘monism’ as the ‘materialist elimination’ of ‘idealist’ Cartesian mind-body dualism.⁸⁹ This Luria sees as being harmonious with Marxism, which draws a ‘firm line between itself and a static, metaphysical view of things that tends to see phenomena as discrete, isolated, unchanging essences, not as processes.’⁹⁰ Luria's emphasis is on the environmental impact of the world on the individual, something he expresses in explicitly Marxist terms: ‘the human mind is a product of the brain and, in the last analysis the effect of the social environment and the class relations and conditions of production underlying it.’⁹¹ He castigates

⁸⁸ V.N. Voloshinov, *Freudianism: A Critical Essay*, trans. by I.R. Titunik (London; Verso, 2014), p. 120.

⁸⁹ V.I. Lenin, ‘Materialism and Empirico-Criticism’, *Collected Works, Vol. 14*, trans. by Abraham Fineberg (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 90. See also, G. V. Plekhanov, *The Development of the Monist View of History* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Pub. House, [1895] 1956). Interestingly, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud explicitly defines his understanding of libidinal energy as ‘dualistic’ in contrast to the ‘monism’ of Jung, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis ...’, p. 28.

⁹¹ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 27.

mainstream psychology for its alignment with idealist philosophy, favouring instead a materialist approach.

Psychology for Luria must be both biological and sociological; it must consider consciousness as something historically determined, rather than essential and eternal. Psychoanalysis, he claims, is the only school of psychology that meets these criteria, that devotes itself to studying ‘the whole individual, his behaviour, inner workings, and motive forces [...] instead of "extrasocial" man in general, studied in abstraction from the social conditions forming him.’⁹² For Luria, it is psychoanalysis’s emphasis on the interrelation between mind, body and the ever-changing environment that distinguishes it from other approaches to the mind. Both Marxism and psychoanalysis, Luria claims, aim to look ‘beyond the surface of things to their real roots’,⁹³ delving into the unconscious is for Luria a practical and materialist approach, firmly grounded in a belief in the primacy of history.

In attempting to underline the affinities between Marxism and psychoanalysis, however, Luria inadvertently hits on their incommensurability. Luria insists that the goal of Marxism is ‘to study the world so as to be able to change it; and this activist, practical orientation runs like a life-line throughout its system.’⁹⁴ For Luria, this necessitates that ‘man be studied as an integral biosocial organism’ (the approach he aligns with psychoanalysis), insisting that only then will it be possible to ‘exert a moulding influence’ on people.⁹⁵ He is so focused on psychoanalysis’s supposedly ‘monistic’ understanding of the psyche, that he completely overlooks the innate instinctual conservatism that Freud insists upon, substituting it with optimistic faith in the perfectibility and plasticity of human nature.

On this point, Lev Vygotsky, whom Luria met in 1924, is more attentive to the tensions between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Vygotsky was briefly a member of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society in the mid-1920s, but remained far less involved in the psychoanalytic community than his younger colleague. He delivered

⁹² Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 31.

⁹³ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 47.

⁹⁴ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 33.

two talks at the State Psychoanalytic Institute in Moscow: in 1924 he spoke on the subject of the ‘Application of the Psycho-analytic Method in Literature’ discussing the ambivalent quality of artworks and in March 1927 he delivered a paper on ‘The Psychology of Art in Freud’s Works’.⁹⁶ Unlike Luria, who emphasises the dynamism of psychoanalysis, Vygotsky perceives that the psychoanalytic prioritising of eternal unconscious instincts is insufficiently historical, giving too much weight to sexuality and early childhood experience: ‘Communism and totem, the church and Dostoevsky's creative work, occultism and advertising, myth and Leonardo da Vinci’s inventions – it is all disguised and masked sex and sexuality and that is all there is to it.’⁹⁷ He remarks scornfully of Freud’s essay on Da Vinci that it is, ‘as if psychoanalysis had a catalogue of sex symbols, and these symbols remained the same at all times, for all peoples.’⁹⁸ It is crucial here to emphasise the second part of this sentence over the first: although Vygotsky is critical of the psychoanalytic emphasis on sexuality, his main concern is not the sexual nature of Freud’s symbols but their immutability. From a Marxist perspective, his main problem with psychoanalysis is that it is ‘not dynamic, but highly static conservative [...] It directly reduces the higher mental processes - both personal and collective ones – to primitive, primordial, essentially prehistorical, prehuman root, leaving no room for history [...] everything is reduced to the same source.’⁹⁹

Vygotsky explicitly addressed the short-comings of Luria's essay in ‘The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology’ (a manuscript written in 1926). He attacks the ‘methodological unscrupulousness and eclecticism’¹⁰⁰ of writers like Luria

⁹⁵ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 33.

⁹⁶ Luria, ‘Russian Psychoanalytic Society, Second-Fourth Quarters, 1924’, *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 6 (1925), 243-245 and ‘Russian Psychoanalytic Society, First Quarter, 1927’, *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 8 (1927), 454-5.

⁹⁷ Vygotsky, ‘The Historical Meaning of The Crisis in Psychology’ in *The Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky*, vol. 3, ed. by Robert W. Rieber and Jeffrey Wollcock, trans. by René van der Veer (Plenum Press, New York, 1997), pp. 233-343, p. 245.

⁹⁸ Vygotsky, *The Psychology of Art*, trans. by Scripta Technica Inc. (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1971), p. 81.

⁹⁹ Vygotsky, ‘Crisis in Psychology’, p. 263. Vygotsky’s dismissal of psychoanalysis is echoed in Luria’s repentant 1932 article, suggesting that Luria’s specific criticisms of Freud may have come from discussions with his collaborator and not only been the result of political pressures. In that article Luria expressed concern with psychoanalysis’ interest in ‘the primitive, prehistorical biological roots of the human personality.’ A. Luria, ‘Krisis burzhuznoi psikhologii,’ [‘The Crisis in Bourgeois Psychology’] *Psikhologiia*, 1-2 (1932), 63-88, p. 66. Recall that in his 1924 essay he overlooked this element of psychoanalytic theory; at no point did he embrace it.

¹⁰⁰ Vygotsky, ‘Crisis’, p. 261.

who overlook 'very flagrant, sharp contradictions',¹⁰¹ in order to synthesise Marxism with psychoanalysis. Such 'monstrous combinations' result in 'naïve transformations of both systems'.¹⁰² Luria ignores the bourgeois roots of Freud's theory and overlooks 'the centre' of the psychoanalytic system: sexuality.¹⁰³ Vygotsky's criticisms of Luria are echoed in Voloshinov's *Freudianism*. Voloshinov agrees with Luria that a Marxist approach to psychology demands a consideration of the 'whole personality' but questions Luria's claim that psychoanalysis achieves this. According to Voloshinov, a historical materialist psychology must consider individuals as they exist in dialectical interaction with the world, whereas psychoanalysis isolates and atomises individuals.¹⁰⁴

Despite Vygotsky's insistence that psychoanalysis is fundamentally incompatible with Marxism, unlike Voloshinov, he does not argue that Marxists should therefore turn their back on psychoanalytic concepts altogether. On the contrary, he claims it is precisely the methodological shortcomings of psychoanalysis that make it a fertile ground for Marxists. He recognises the complexity and richness of Freud's theory, crucially acknowledging that it 'avoids becoming a system'.¹⁰⁵ Just as Marx succeeded in turning Hegel on his head, Vygotsky claims that psychoanalytic concepts must be imported into an existing framework, tested according to its principles and integrated into the architecture of its system. Vygotsky's claim that psychoanalysis might be compatible with materialism had been publicly expressed by Trotsky who wrote to Pavlov in 1923, suggesting that the psychologist's theories of conditioned reflexes might be fruitfully combined with psychoanalysis. The letter was subsequently printed in *Pravda*.¹⁰⁶ In their co-written introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Luria and Vygotsky attempted to effect this importation.

Sabina Spielrein and the Search for a Superman

¹⁰¹ Vygotsky, 'Crisis', p. 262.

¹⁰² Vygotsky, 'Crisis', p. 265.

¹⁰³ Vygotsky, 'Crisis', p. 262.

¹⁰⁴ V.N. Voloshinov, 'Freidizm: Kriticheskii Oчерk' ['Freudianism: A Critical Essay'], *Bakhtin pod Maskoi* [*Bakhtin Beneath the Mask*] (Moscow, Labirint, 2004), pp. 85-103. Voloshinov's critique of Luria is included in the book's closing chapter, omitted from the English translation of the text cited above.

¹⁰⁵ Vygotsky, 'Crisis', p. 263

¹⁰⁶ See, Miller, pp. 87-88.

Before turning to a discussion of Luria and Vygotsky's Introduction to Freud's essay, however, it is worth taking a step backwards to consider that the death drive has a pre-revolutionary Russian pre-history. In a footnote towards the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud acknowledges the 'instructive and interesting' though ultimately 'unclear' contribution of Russian psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein to his understanding of the destructive impulses inherent in sexuality.¹⁰⁷ Although both Freud and Carl Jung (who was Spielrein's analyst and lover) were rather churlish in their public acknowledgment of Spielrein, emphasising the neurotic content of her writing over its theoretical merits, the influence of her work on Freud's essay is palpable. Spielrein recorded in her diary in September 1910 that Jung had 'listened [...] with rapture' to her ideas for a 'new study on the death instinct', encouraging her to develop her theories.¹⁰⁸ These theoretical discussions between Spielrein and Jung took place in an erotically-charged atmosphere; her narration of their intensely intellectual romance, which she describes as a 'savage passion',¹⁰⁹ constantly frames sex in relation to death: 'I do believe I am capable of destroying myself with cyanide in the presence of my idol'.¹¹⁰ After finishing the paper she writes to Jung that it seems clear to her 'why coitus so often appears in dreams as dying'.¹¹¹

'Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being' (first published in German in 1912) introduces some of the concepts that Freud eventually went on to elaborate eight years later. Spielrein imagined the essay as her and Jung's son, 'the product of our love'.¹¹² In it she asks why the most intensely pleasurable experiences are often accompanied by 'a feeling of resistance, of anxiety, or disgust'.¹¹³ For Spielrein, creation is always accompanied by destruction; sex is always accompanied by death.

¹⁰⁷ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 55. In a letter to Spielrein in 1912, Jung praises her 'extraordinarily intelligent' essay, acknowledging that 'the death tendency or death wish was clear to you before it was to me.' Jung to Spielrein, March 25 1912 cited in Coline Covington and Barbara Wharton, *Sabina Spielrein: Forgotten Pioneer of Psychoanalysis* (Hove; Brunner-Routledge, 2003), p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ Sabina Spielrein, Diary entry, September 1910 in Carotenuto, p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Spielrein, Diary entry, November 9 1910, Carotenuto, p. 33

¹¹⁰ Sabina Spielrein, Diary entry, October 9 1910, *A Secret Symmetry*, p. 21. By late October Spielrein claims that her love for Jung was so overwhelming that it prevented her from working on 'my new study 'On the Death Instinct' – Spielrein, Diary entry, 24 (23) October 1910, Carotenuto, p. 33.

¹¹¹ Spielrein, Letter to Jung, Early 1912, Carotenuto, p. 49.

¹¹² Spielrein, Letter to Jung, Early 1912, Carotenuto, p. 48.

¹¹³ Spielrein, 'Destruction as the Cause of Coming Into Being,' *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 39 (1994), 155-186, p. 156.

Not only is birth a violent and painful experience, but the act of conception is also a moment of self-annihilation. Although she accepts Freud's understanding of pleasure and the necessary avoidance of unpleasure, she ventures beyond in her suggestion that 'the personal psyche is governed by unconscious impulses that *lie deeper* and, in their demands, are unconcerned with our feeling reactions [...] In our depths, there is something that, as paradoxical as it may sound, wills self-injury.'¹¹⁴ The essay conceives of a tension between collective and personal psyches, two antagonistic tendencies, the former of which desires transformation, while the latter 'strives for self-preservation in its present form (inertia)'.¹¹⁵ Despite its name, what Spielrein calls the collective psyche has less in common with Jung's conception of the collective unconscious as a trove of ancient archetypes, than it does with Freud's reality principle: it is the outward-facing, social form of the psyche which keeps in check personal urges and impulses.

According to Derrida, Freud's conception of the death drive, 'coincides almost literally with several Nietzschean propositions',¹¹⁶ a proximity so close that Freud refuses to acknowledge the debt. By contrast, Spielrein's essay explicitly relies on Nietzsche. She discusses his use of images of destruction in relation to love and knowledge – 'The Will to Love: that is to be willing to die!'¹¹⁷ Her reading of Nietzsche's conception of the superman is tied to the destruction necessitated by procreation. His proclamation: 'Man is something to be overcome [...] in order for the superman to appear', she reads as the necessity to destroy the self (conceive) in order to create something new (give birth). The superman, she contends, can only attain its 'greatest vitality' through violent destruction; it is born of a struggle.¹¹⁸ She acknowledges that for Nietzsche eternal recurrence demands the return not only of the highest form of life, the superman, but also of the lowest, the 'smallest man'. Although Nietzsche's thought is preoccupied with the 'highest affirmation of life', his thought bears within it a 'simultaneous contradiction'; the superman can never rid itself of this 'dreaded element', the 'abysmal thought' of the low.¹¹⁹ The ambivalence,

¹¹⁴ Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 159 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁵ Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 159.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (London; University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 269.

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, cited in Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 170.

¹¹⁸ Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 171.

¹¹⁹ Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 171.

tension and contradictory qualities that Spielrein identifies in Nietzsche's work have obvious parallels with the death drive as Freud went on to conceive of it. Advancement for both Freud and Nietzsche is always accompanied, indeed paradoxically propelled by, an eternal compulsion to go backwards.

Spielrein returned permanently to Soviet Russia in 1923, joining the Psychoanalytic Society in Moscow at the same time as Luria.¹²⁰ Etkind makes much of Spielrein's overlap with Luria and Vygotsky at the Psychoanalytic Society and the State Psychological Institute, speculating on the influence she must have exerted on them. He wistfully imagines two provincial young men in thrall to a dazzling woman, before concluding that Vygotsky's ideas might thus be understood as being 'much closer to psychoanalysis than to Marxism [...] more deeply connected to a Freudian understanding of parental roles than to the infinitely politicised concepts that were referred to as the Marxist study of the environment.'¹²¹ In his early publications Vygotsky was fond of citing the closing lines of Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924) which foresaw the emergence of 'a higher social biological type, or, if you please, a superman' under communism, indicating some overlap with Spielrein's Nietzschean concerns.¹²² Nietzsche's works were removed from Soviet People's Libraries in 1923 but private publishers (which were still permitted during the NEP period) continued to print his works.¹²³ Spielrein's Nietzschean preoccupations, not only draw on common Germanic motifs, but also chime with the concerns of early twentieth-century Russian intelligentsia on both sides of the revolution.¹²⁴ Etkind cites Nietzsche as the main inspiration for Soviet

¹²⁰ Luria and Spielrein both joined the Society in autumn 1923. See, Luria, 'Russian Psychoanalytic Society', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 5 (1924), 258-261.

¹²¹ Etkind, p. 175.

¹²² Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. by Rose Strunsky (London; RedWords, 1991), p. 283. The closing passages of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* appear in Vygotsky's *Pedagogical Psychology*, *The Psychology of Art* and *The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology* (all dating from 1926). See, Anton Yasnitsky, 'Lev Vygotsky: Philologist and Defectologist, A Sociointellectual Biography' in *Portraits of Pioneers in Developmental Psychology*, ed. by Wade Pickren, Donald A. Dewsbury and Michael Wertheimer (London; Psychology Press, 2011), pp. 109-134. A detailed discussion of Trotsky's engagement with psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. See Miller, p. 87 and Etkind, pp. 230-243.

¹²³ See, *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*, ed. by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 7.

¹²⁴ For a detailed consideration of the Bolshevik engagement with Nietzsche, see: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park, PA; Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

notions of perfectibility; for conceiving of the human as something that could be fundamentally changed.¹²⁵

There are, however, crucial differences between Trotsky (Vygotsky) and Nietzsche (Spielrein). For Nietzsche, the possibility for the ascendance of a 'superman' is premised on the re-instatement of a slave society. He claims that the mediocrity of the herd can only be overturned by a return to the social structures of the ancient world.¹²⁶ Indeed, in his 1900 essay 'Something on the Philosophy of the 'Superman'', Trotsky explicitly decried the authoritarian and elitist tenor of Nietzsche's philosophy.¹²⁷ Spielrein notes that for Nietzsche 'the highest also contains the lowest', that both the superman and the 'smallest man' will always recur.¹²⁸ In Trotsky's vision, on the other hand, the transformation is collective; all people will ascend to a higher level: 'Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler [...] The average human type will rise to the level of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.'¹²⁹ Although he borrows the term 'superman' from Nietzsche, Trotsky repurposes it, importing it into a Marxist framework and emptying it of its originally oppressive characteristics.

Luria and Vygotsky approached Freud in a similar manner. Etkind describes their physical proximity to Spielrein but fails to analyse the theoretical distance between their respective arguments about psychoanalysis. For although Luria and Vygotsky were sympathetic to and interested in Freud, their works explicitly attempted to make Freudian theory compatible with Marxism. The NEP period may have been more open than the Stalin-era that was to follow but the fierce debates that Luria and Vygotsky actively participated in were already intensely politicised. The influence of Spielrein on her younger colleagues can only be speculated upon but an analysis of Luria and Vygotsky's reading of Freud's essay reveals a reliance on an

¹²⁵ Etkind, p. 184.

¹²⁶ See particularly, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Arnold Kaufman (New York, NY; Vintage, 1967).

¹²⁷ L. Trotsky, 'Koe-cto o filosofii "sverkhcheloveka"' ['Something on the Philosophy of the 'Superman'] in *Sochineniia*, 20 (Moscow; Gosizdat, 1926), 147-62. An English translation is available here: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1900/12/nietzsche.htm>> (Accessed July 27 2015).

¹²⁸ Spielrein, 'Destruction', p. 171.

¹²⁹ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 284.

orthodox Marxist-Leninist understanding of historical progression quite alien to Spielrein's eroticised, Nietzschean conception of the death instincts.

Life after Death Drive: Luria and Vygotsky Read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

‘The Soviet Union is a besieged fortress, and those who hold this fortress are keeping a close check on all imports, including scientific ideas.’¹³⁰ In the summer of 1929 the communist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich spent two months in Moscow. In his essay ‘Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union’ (1929) he reflected on the ‘contradictory impressions’ gained during his stay in the Soviet capital.¹³¹ Reich describes encountering a psychological community hostile to psychoanalysis as a world-view but amenable to certain Freudian concepts deemed materialist, particularly the notion that sexual energy might be sublimated into collective work on behalf of the revolution.¹³² This is consistent with Luria’s recollection of the appeal of psychoanalysis in the early 1920s:

Many of Freud's ideas seemed speculative and somewhat fantastic to me, but the study of emotional conflicts and complexes using the method of associations seemed promising. Here, I thought, was a scientific approach that combined a strongly deterministic explanation of concrete, individual behaviour with an explanation of the origins of complex human needs in terms of natural science.¹³³

Nonetheless, psychoanalysis, Reich reports, was attacked for placing too much emphasis on sexuality, for prioritising the individual over the collective and for being insufficiently practical. A year later the Soviet psychoanalytic experiment was over.

Reich was soon rejected by both psychoanalytic and communist establishments: his work was denounced in the German Communist Party press in 1932 and he was officially expelled from the International Psychoanalytic

¹³⁰ Wilhelm Reich, ‘Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union’, *Sex-Pol: Essays, 1929-1934*, ed. by Lee Baxandall (London; Verso, 2012), pp. 75-90, p. 88.

¹³¹ Reich, ‘Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union,’ p. 87. It is unclear whether Reich met Luria and Vygotsky in Moscow. He does, however, refer to their more bombastically ideological colleague, pedologist Aron Zalkind.

¹³² For an example typical of the ‘materialist’ Soviet deployment of sublimation see, Aron Zalkind, *Revolutsiia i molodezh [Revolution and Youth]* (Moscow; Izdanie Kommunistich Sverdlova, 1925).

¹³³ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 23. Luria comes to a similar conclusion in the entry he wrote on psychoanalysis for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* in 1940. See, A. Luria, ‘Psikhoanaliz’, *Bolshaiia Sovietskaiia Entsiklopediia*, tom. 47, (Moscow/Leningrad; 1940), pp. 186-187.

Association in 1934.¹³⁴ In the preceding years, between 1928 and 1932, Reich participated in a discussion group consisting of members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society convened by Freud. Richard Sterba, who attended the events, later recalled a discussion between Reich and Freud concerning the situation in Russia. Sterba guessed that the conversation took place in 1929 or 1930, around the time of Reich's trip to the Soviet Union. Reich was said to have insisted that the Oedipus complex was historically contingent; that the abolition of the family would entail an abolition of the Oedipus complex. Such a radical reordering of social life, Reich declared, was already underway in Soviet Russia.¹³⁵ Freud is reported to have responded:

Nobody knows whether this [transformation] is at all possible. However, theoretically it is most improbable. Besides, Reich's proposals are completely unpsychological. Economic changes (in the Marxist sense) without psychology will not suffice. One also must always consider the influence of the past.¹³⁶

Freud's comment on the past here indicates a fundamental discrepancy between the two thinkers. Reich assumed that a transformation of external social conditions would immediately transform the internal psychic conditions of people born in that context; that changes in the monetary economy would change libidinal economies in turn. But for Freud the past survives. In Reich's account an individual's past stretches back no further than their birth, whereas Freud insisted that the past is both more distant and more tenacious.

This theoretical divergence is explored in Reich's essay 'Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis' (1929), first published in the Russian language journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. In this essay, Reich expresses his reservations with Freud's conception of the death drive as introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, alluding to the confused reception of Freud's new speculative theorisation of the drives by the psychoanalytic community, which upon its initial publication in

¹³⁴ See, Myron Sharaf, *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich* (New York, NY; St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 160-191.

¹³⁵ Reich discusses the Soviet Union at length in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (London; Souvenir Press, 1972), pp. 205-284.

¹³⁶ Richard F. Sterba, 'Discussions of Sigmund Freud', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 47 (1978), 173-191, pp. 181-182.

German was greeted with bemusement, discomfort and even hostility.¹³⁷ Reich describes the tension between life and death as a relationship of assimilation to dissimulation: Eros or the life instincts construct and combine whereas the death drive decays and decomposes. He calls this dynamic ‘wholly dialectical’.¹³⁸ Reich was, however, troubled by the death drive’s ‘idealistic and metaphysical’ qualities, which have, he argued, ‘no obvious material foundation.’¹³⁹ He therefore proposes a materialist re-working of the death drive. Rather than following Freud’s assertion that the death drive precedes the pleasure principle, Reich claims that it is instead formed in response to it: ‘The destructive instinct, in my view, is a later, secondary formation of the organism, determined by the conditions under which the self-preservation and sexual instincts are satisfied.’¹⁴⁰ The death drive is reinvented as a product of experience, rather than a pre-existing, more primal instinct. This allows Reich to make the claim that the transformation of society through revolution would entail the transformation of humanity. He aligns the reality principle with capitalist society:

the reality principle as it exists today is only the principle of *our* society [...] the reality principle of the capitalist era imposes upon the proletarian a maximum limitation of his needs while appealing to religious values, such as modesty and humility [...] All this is founded on economic conditions; the ruling class has a reality principle which serves the perpetuation of its power.¹⁴¹

Reich thus re-imagines the opposition between life and death instincts as one between inside (psyche) and outside (social), which he says is ultimately resolvable. Reich assumes that a revolution in social and psychic life would be capable of erasing all that came before.

Four years before Reich published this discussion of the death drive, Luria and Vygotsky wrote their Introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Although they did not share Reich’s interest in sexuality, Luria and Vygotsky similarly mapped

¹³⁷ On the reception of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and its place in Freud's oeuvre, see: Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Times* (London; JM Dent & Sons, 1988), p. 402. According to Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis: 'The notion of a death instinct [...] has not managed to gain the acceptance of his [Freud's] disciples and successors in the way the majority of his conceptual contributions have done and it is still one of the most controversial of psychoanalytic concepts.' Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London; Karnac, 2006), p. 97.

¹³⁸ Reich, ‘Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis’, *Sex-Pol*, pp. 1-74, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Reich, ‘Dialectical Materialism,’ p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Reich, ‘Dialectical Materialism,’ p. 18.

the Freudian conflict between 'conservative biological' tendencies and 'progressive sociological'¹⁴² influences onto a Marxist conception of the tension between subject and environment. They characterised the tension between the pleasure principle and the reality principle as 'the whole dialectic of the organism'.¹⁴³ Freud's theory is translated to become a theorisation of environmental adaptation; the internal pleasure principle is regulated by the external demands of the reality principle. As in Reich's essay, this reading demands a neat dichotomy be drawn between internal and external and between the biological and the social, which glosses over the complexities of Freud's essay. Luria and Vygotsky substitute the reality principle for reality, setting up a neat subject-object relation that does not have a counterpart in Freud's text. For Freud, the reality principle might be formed as a shield against external stimuli, but it is an internalised aspect of the organism. Conversely, by erecting a neat division between inside and outside, Luria and Vygotsky were able to suggest it might be possible to escape the conservatism of the instincts Freud insists upon. In a bold utopian move, they attempt to look beyond the reality principle. For them, the capacity for change lies in the external material environment. Luria and Vygotsky do observe that Freud's insistence on the conservative character of the instincts could lead to the conclusion that his 'concepts are permeated with the psychology of hopeless pessimism'.¹⁴⁴ Yet they throw this potential accusation 'out of court',¹⁴⁵ attempting to find a way past it by claiming that transforming external conditions could ultimately result in a fundamental transformation of human psychology:

The only forces which make it possible to escape from this state of biological conservatism and which may propel us toward progress and activity, are external forces, in our terms, the external conditions of the material environment in which the individual exists. It is they that represent the true basis of progress, it is they that create the real personality and make us adapt and work out new forms of psychic life.¹⁴⁶

Luria and Vygotsky's attempt to bypass the conservatism of the instincts here conforms to what Jacqueline Rose, presumably unaware of this early Soviet

¹⁴¹ Reich, 'Dialectical Materialism,' p. 20.

¹⁴² Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 17.

¹⁴³ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 15.

intervention, identifies as a tendency that runs throughout the history of Marxist readings of Freud:

The alternate discarding or reification of the unconscious has been the constant refrain of the Freudian left [...] historically, whenever the political argument is made for psychoanalysis, this dynamic is polarised into a crude opposition between inside and outside – a radical Freudianism always having to argue that the social produces the misery of the psychic in a one-way process, which utterly divests the psychic of its own mechanisms and drives. Each time the psychoanalytic description of internal conflict and psychic division is referred to its social conditions, the latter absorb the former, and the unconscious shifts in that same moment – from the site of a division into the vision of an ideal unity to come.¹⁴⁷

By equating Eros with the social and the death drive with the biological, they also skate over the lasting implications of the death drive, the major theoretical contribution of Freud's essay. They fail to look beyond the pleasure principle at all. Beyond for Freud, indicates something behind, beneath and before - 'more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle'¹⁴⁸ – whereas they are looking somewhere ahead, above and after into a bright yet ephemeral emancipated ideal unity to come.

Luria and Vygotsky describe the on-going tension between life and death as being 'responsible for the distinctive 'spiral' development of the human being.'¹⁴⁹ Spirals litter the pages of Soviet discussions of dialectical development. As Lenin states in 'On the Question of Dialectics', first published in 1925 in the journal *Bolshevik*: 'Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral.'¹⁵⁰ The image of the spiral gestures towards the negation of the negation, a process that simultaneously overcomes and preserves the past, dragging it forwards and thus transforming it in the process. In *Capital, Volume I* Marx argued that capitalism would lead to socialism through a process of negation.¹⁵¹ Luria and Vygotsky proclaim that they intend to take a similar approach to psychoanalysis, identifying the 'materialistic

¹⁴⁷ Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London; Verso, 1986), pp. 8-10.

¹⁴⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ Lenin, 'On the Question of Dialectics', *Collected Works*, vol. 38, pp. 355-363, p. 363.

¹⁵¹ 'Capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation.' Karl Marx, 'Capital Vol. 1', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, trans. by Richard Dixon and others (New York, NY; International Publishers, 1987), p. 751.

buds' sprouting from Freud's 'bourgeois' theory.¹⁵² Engels explains the concept of the negation of the negation in *Anti-Dühring* by way of a similar biological metaphor (which recalls the metaphors employed by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Engels imagines a grain of barley, which, when planted in suitable soil undergoes a change and germinates: 'the grain as such ceases to exist, it is negated, and in its place appears the plant which has arisen from it, the negation of the grain'.¹⁵³ This plant then goes on to produce further grains of barley, 'and as soon as these have ripened the stalk dies, is in its turn negated. As a result of this negation of the negation we have once again the original grain of barley, but not as a single unit, but ten-, twenty- or thirtyfold.'¹⁵⁴ This quantitative improvement might also, he claims, become a qualitative improvement. Here he uses the example of flowers, which can through the 'gardener's art' produce not only more but improved seeds. Lenin describes the interaction with the past implied by these kinds of processes as an 'apparent', rather than an actual, 'return to the old.'¹⁵⁵

The Freudian compulsion to repeat does superficially have a correlate in the negation of the negation. Paradoxically, for Freud, the organism's move away from the most primitive instincts is propelled by repressed instincts which seek to repeat themselves in the present, but, crucially, are never satisfied. The repetition is always a faint echo of the original – 'no sublimation will suffice to remove the repressed instincts persisting tension' – for there is always a gap between 'the pleasure of satisfaction demanded and that which is actually achieved'.¹⁵⁶ Transference and sublimation are repetitions that are never identical to the original repressed event. For Freud, the transformation, however, moves in the opposite direction to that described by Engels: both quality and quantity are diminished, rather than enlarged and improved. This inevitable disappointment might occasion forward propulsion, but it is never entirely liberated from the past. Indeed, Freud challenges the entire notion of progress as improvement altogether, stating that 'it is often merely a matter of opinion when we declare that one stage of development is higher than another',

¹⁵² Luria and Vygotsky, 'Introduction', p. 17.

¹⁵³ Engels, 'Anti-Dühring' in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works, vol. 25*, trans. by Emile Burns (New York, NY; International Publishers, 1987), pp. 5-312, p. 126. Luria discusses *Anti-Dühring* in 'Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology', p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ Engels, 'Anti-Dühring', p. 126.

¹⁵⁵ Lenin, 'Conspectus', p. 222.

¹⁵⁶ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 42.

arguing instead that ‘all that is most precious in human civilization’ is simply the by-product of repressed instincts.¹⁵⁷ In his 1930 essay *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud’s discussion makes clear that the kinds of biological metaphors employed by Engels do not adequately capture the temporality of the unconscious:

The embryo cannot be discovered in the adult. The thymus gland of childhood is replaced after puberty by connective tissue, but is no longer present in itself; in the marrow-bones of the grown man I can, it is true, trace the outline of the child’s bone, but it itself has disappeared, having lengthened and thickened until it has attained its definitive form.¹⁵⁸

The unconscious resists such metaphorical description because it is characterised by simultaneity rather than succession; it preserves ‘all the earlier stages alongside of the final form’.¹⁵⁹ Luria and Vygotsky’s model of advancement is closer to Engels’s than Freud’s, as their understanding of progress is premised on a past that transforms at each stage of development, rather than persisting, however buried and directly inaccessible, in its original form.

Vygotsky likens the transition from childhood to adolescence to the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly. This qualitative transition, he insists, combines creation with destruction, life with death: 'The complex merging of processes of dying and being born interwoven one with the other.'¹⁶⁰ Despite his general hostility to psychoanalysis, Vygotsky does acknowledge the importance of Freud's conception of the death drive here. This he frames as a question of negativity. Yet he claims that to conceive of death negatively, as the inverse of life as 'an empty hole, a gaping spot', is the problem with most traditional biological accounts of death.¹⁶¹ Freud's theory is valuable for recognising the positive value of death: 'death is a fact that has its positive sense as well, it is a special type of being and not merely non-being. It is a specific something and not absolutely nothing.'¹⁶² Here Vygotsky invokes Engels’s discussion of the Hegelian conception of death in *The Dialectics of Nature*: ‘life is always thought of in relation to its necessary result,

¹⁵⁷ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁸ Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents’, *Standard Edition*, vol. 21 (London; Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 5-57, p. 19.

¹⁵⁹ Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents’, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ Lev Vygotsky, ‘Pedology of the Adolescent,’ *The Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky, Vol. 5, Child Psychology*, trans. by Marie J. Hall (New York, NY; Plenum, 1998), pp. 3-186, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ Vygotsky, ‘Crisis in Psychology’, p. 265.

¹⁶² Vygotsky, ‘Crisis in Psychology’, p. 265.

death, which is always contained in it in germ. The dialectical conception of life is nothing more than this [...] Living means dying.’¹⁶³

This acknowledgment of the productive co-existence of life and death is not reflected in Luria and Vygotsky’s introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, however. Despite recognising that the tension between life and death prompts development, they refuse to accept the existence of a regressive drive, which effectively eliminates that opposition. For Freud, the death drive is compelled backwards - ‘to restore an earlier state of things.’¹⁶⁴ There is ‘no universal instinct toward higher development’.¹⁶⁵ Freud also insists that the sexual instincts are ‘difficult to ‘educate’’, and explicitly comments in *The Future of an Illusion* (translated into Russian in 1930) that ‘the limitations of man’s capacity for education set bounds to the effectiveness of [...] a transformation in his culture’.¹⁶⁶ These stubborn and intractable, backward looking yet utterly untamed qualities are anathema to Luria and Vygotsky’s political vision. In Freud’s account civilization is built on repression; the compulsion to repeat is thus paradoxically what propels civilization forwards. The *apparent* existence of a progressive tendency in life is the result of the dualistic structure of the instincts. The ‘marked opposition’ between life and death is responsible for the impelling thrust Freud’s essay delineates, which he describes in the following terms:¹⁶⁷

It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and thus prolong the journey.¹⁶⁸

Luria and Vygotsky imply that biology is subservient to external forces, that new forms of society could fundamentally re-configure humanity and overcome the inertia of the instincts. They fail to note that for Freud the interaction between the organism and the external world generates change, and that the propulsive result of

¹⁶³ Engels, ‘The Dialectics of Nature’ in *Karl Marx/ Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 25, pp. 313-644, p. 572. Vygotsky discusses this passage in ‘Crisis in Psychology’, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 266.

¹⁶⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ Freud, ‘The Future of an Illusion’, *Standard Edition*, vol. 21 (London; Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 5-57, p. 23.

¹⁶⁷ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 32

¹⁶⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 41.

this interaction is due to the co-existence of contradictory trajectories. The instincts may be immutable and the unconscious without temporality, but the organism Freud describes is not therefore impervious to change. Luria and Vygotsky's attempt to politically radicalise Freud drains it of the thrusting tension between opposing drives, precisely the element of the text they praise for being dialectical in the first place. They replace dualism with monism and are left with a stagnant dialectic curiously devoid of tension.

For Freud, life emerged out of inorganic matter and strives to return there. This does posit a time of reconciliation: the time before life began. The death drive, he writes, 'was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance'.¹⁶⁹ Freud's understanding of death as inorganic nature, his speculative vision of a universe preceding life as such, should not, however, be confused with the death drive; the death drive is not identical with death. Death precedes and succeeds life, whereas the death drive and life instincts are mutually constituted and coextensive. The death drive, governed by the Nirvana principle, might be impelled to reduce tensions but its interaction with life counter-intuitively produces them. Freud describes the emergence of the death drive by way of a biological analogy. He imagines a tiny cell which, in order to survive, must form a protective shield against external stimuli. The death drive is born of the non-identity of living organisms with their inorganic surroundings. In forming this mediating layer, Freud states that the organism's 'outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter, becomes to some degree inorganic.'¹⁷⁰ In order to survive, life is coated in a layer of death. Like the internalised death drive of which it is a precursor, this inorganic 'crust' functions to protect life rather than foreshorten it. For Freud, as long as there is life there is antagonism. Death itself might be inert but as a drive inherent to organic existence it generates friction and produces change. Although Freud claims there is an innate urge to return to inanimate nature, this is coupled with the desire to die one's 'natural death'. The life instincts thus paradoxically perform the function of 'myrmidons of death', chaperoning the organism through the dangerous external world.¹⁷¹ The death drive is not a suicidal tendency but instead impels the organism

¹⁶⁹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁰ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 27.

¹⁷¹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 39.

to take a series of long detours in order to safely reach its final predetermined destination. As Derrida observes in his forensic analysis of Freud's discussion of the death drive in *The Postcard*, life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is understood as 'an accident of death.'¹⁷² Freud's insistence that death is internal to life explains why organisms resist the urge to die immediately; why the death drive takes 'the deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new.'¹⁷³ For Freud, the changes that occur in living things are conditioned by the stasis of the inorganic; the apparently progressive tendencies of living things are a product of their desire to return to an original quiescent state. Ultimately, this inert state is less significant than the paths that the organism takes to get there. Dying means living.

The potentially dialectical qualities of Freud's text therefore reside in the 'sharp distinction' between life and death instincts and the opposition of construction and destruction that they embody: 'one constructive or assimilatory and the other destructive or dissimilatory'.¹⁷⁴ The death drive negates. For Freud, as for Hegel, 'tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts [the Subject] into Being'; beings paradoxically contain and are conditioned by both being and non-being.¹⁷⁵ In their discussion of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Luria and Vygotsky sketch out a development that transforms dialectically at every stage, but they drain this movement of negativity and thus point to a moment of final reconciliation, implicitly positing the emergence of a final communist society without continuing tensions, contradictions and negations. Instead of imagining a reconciled moment prior to life (death as inorganic nature) Luria and Vygotsky's discussion of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* situates that moment in the future (life under communism). This implied vision of the future thus emerges as closer to Freud's image of death than to the death drive; communism is envisaged as a final product rather than an ongoing process. The historical textures of the unfolding present are thus subordinated to an idealised moment to come. Beyond the pages of their text,

¹⁷² Derrida, *Postcard*, p. 355.

¹⁷³ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 19.

however, the historical realities of post-revolutionary Soviet Russia already pulled against their framework for understanding psychological and historical development.

History and Human Conflicts

Derrida visited the Soviet Union in 1990. His reflections on the experience of visiting Moscow are framed in relation to the history of travelogues of the Soviet Capital. According to Derrida, these narratives are distinct from the genre of travel writing in that they represent 'something quite other than a trip to a particular country or a determined culture' but instead constitute a quest for universal meaning, for the Absolute.¹⁷⁶ The USSR is, he says, 'a properly political name. I know of no other example of a comparable phenomenon in the history of the world.'¹⁷⁷ To travel to Soviet Moscow was thus not only to journey to a foreign city but to seek a mythic ahistorical space, a space purged of anachronism. Shortly after this visit, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he delivered the lecture *Spectres of Marx*, declaring that the collapse of state socialism signalled the end of a particular understanding of history - the end of a faith in the Absolute. In its wake time was left in tatters: 'time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down, *deranged*, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted.'¹⁷⁸ But if the Soviet Union was an idea it was also a place.

Derrida acknowledges 'an interval between a logic of the concrete universal (the incarnation of a cause in the singular history of a 'chosen fatherland') and a logic that abstracts the universal from all national particularity.'¹⁷⁹ Derrida begins his essay 'Fort/Da', invoking the child's game described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and analysed by Derrida in *The Postcard*. For Freud, the game is cited as an example of unpleasurable repetition, the repetitive logic of which Derrida claims also structures Freud's argument in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In Derrida's essay on Moscow, the 'fort' (gone/away) and 'da' (here again) represents the interval between abstract and concrete spaces: 'The 'over there' is the future of the absolute

¹⁷⁶ Derrida, 'Back from Moscow, in the USSR' in *Politics, Theory and Contemporary Culture* ed. by Mark Poster (New York, NY; Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 197-235, p. 212.

¹⁷⁷ Derrida, 'Back...', p. 199.

¹⁷⁸ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, New York and London; 1994), p. 20.

¹⁷⁹ Derrida, 'Back...', p. 221.

'here' towards which this voyage tends.'¹⁸⁰ Derrida perceived that the idea of history that the Soviet Union claimed to have incarnated was always in tension with lived reality. In practice, as the example of the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society suggests, the Soviet Union was never purged of anachronism. The example of Luria's research activities, in contrast to the neat progressive narratives that animate his theoretical engagements with Freud, also bear this out.

Horace Kallen, who visited the Soviet Union in 1928, recalled meeting Luria in his 'dingy room' in which he and his wife 'slept and cooked and ate and worked', preparing their meals on a primus stove whilst earning subsistence level wages.¹⁸¹ Kallen remarked upon the irony that those people upon 'whom avowedly the new Russia depends for a happy and prosperous future' were forced to live in such insalubrious conditions, reflecting that this gap between future promise and lived reality explained 'why whatever Moscow gayety one encountered seemed so forced.'¹⁸² As Freud later commented in 'On The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' (1933): 'In just the same way as religion, Bolshevism too must compensate its believers for the sufferings and deprivations of their present life by promises of a better future in which there will no longer be any unsatisfied need.'¹⁸³

As Kallen and Freud both perceived, Soviet enthusiasm for communism was tied to the promise of a future to come and not commensurate with the privations of everyday life. But not everyone was capable of focusing their gaze hopefully on the distant horizon. Although by Freud's definition, violence and aggression could be understood without moving beyond the pleasure principle, he does suggest, like Spielrein, that an analogy exists between the 'great opposition' of life and death instincts and the similarly polarised relation between love and hate.¹⁸⁴ *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* asks whether sadism and masochism might be considered as

¹⁸⁰ Derrida, 'Back...', p. 219.

¹⁸¹ Horace Kallen, *Frontiers of Hope*, (New York, NY; Arno Press, 1929), p. 289. Kallen does not mention Luria by name, referring only to a 'brilliant young scholar' but Luria makes reference to the passage in a letter to Kallen responding to Kallen's book. Luria praises Kallen's depiction of Moscow but adds wryly that he and his wife did, in fact, have a separate room in which to cook. See, Luria to Kallen, September 29 1929, Horace Kallen Papers, Cincinnati, OH, American Jewish Archives (AJA), Box 19, Folder 18, Luria, Alexander R. 1929-1972.

¹⁸² Kallen, *Frontiers*, p. 290.

¹⁸³ Freud, 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*', p. 180.

¹⁸⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 53

‘displaced’ examples of a death instinct.¹⁸⁵ The notes of the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society attest to the psychic impact of the harsh present. On May 13 1926, for instance, a paper was delivered in Moscow discussing the case of a patient who had burnt herself to death: ‘The writer thought that in this case—that of a girl whom an obsessional impulse drove to commit suicide by burning—illustrates the isolated operation of the destructive instinct.’¹⁸⁶ The speaker insisted that this was an ‘isolated’ incident, however, implying that the operation of a destructive instinct should not be interpreted as a universal phenomenon.

Luria’s *Nature of Human Conflicts: Emotion, Conflict and Will* (1932), based on experiments conducted at the State Institute of Experimental Psychology between 1923 and 1930 and dedicated to Kallen, provides a troubling insight into the violence and confusion of the period. No book based on this research was published in Russian, suggesting that by the time Luria came to write up his research the insights it contained were too troubling to see the light of day. Luria’s theoretical frameworks may have adhered to the party line but the world he observed failed to do so (this discrepancy would cause him more serious problems in the 1930s, as Chapters 2 and 3 discuss). He described the book in a letter to his friend Sergei Eisenstein as a work on ‘criminals, examinations, internal neuroses and other dishonourable types.’¹⁸⁷ Although the research upon which the book is based overlapped with Luria’s engagement with psychoanalysis, his methodology owed more to Pavlov than to Freud.¹⁸⁸

The first set of experiments discussed by Luria were conducted with students waiting to undergo examination as part of the Communist Party’s 1924 purge (literally cleansing [*chistka*]) of students in the higher schools. This intended to eliminate counter-revolutionary ‘bourgeois’ forces from educational institutions,

¹⁸⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁸⁶ Luria and Vera Schmidt, ‘Russian Psycho-Analytical Society’, *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*, 8 (1927), 454-455, p. 454.

¹⁸⁷ Luria to Sergei Eisenstein, February 17 1930, Moscow, Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (RGALI), Sergei Eisenstein Papers, 123-1-19321/26.

¹⁸⁸ Luria outlines his approach in explicitly Pavlovian terms. Freud’s name appears only twice in the book. See, Luria, *The Nature of Human Conflicts or Emotion, Conflict and Will*, trans. by W Horsley Gantt (New York, NY; Liveright, 1932), p. 5.

resulting in the expulsion of 18,000 students from Russian institutions.¹⁸⁹ Students were interrogated on their class and academic backgrounds and their political convictions before the commission decided whether to expel them from the institution. Here the transition to a shiny and pure communist society is shown to be hampered by murky hangovers from the pre-revolutionary era. Luria and his team plucked people directly from the examination queues in the hope of gaining an insight into the psychic impact of this situation. His results focus on the physical agitation and excitability of the subjects. He presented them with a series of words and found that those most closely pertaining to the anticipated interrogation - including 'examination', 'to surrender' and 'commission' - evoked the most extreme physical responses.¹⁹⁰ Luria defined the examination as a traumatic site in which it was possible to observe how 'affect ruptures the organised course of associative processes.'¹⁹¹ The purge is shown to have a 'disorganising' impact on people's thought processes, reducing them to a state 'ordinarily foreign to the cultured adult.'¹⁹² This Bolshevnik policy is explicitly declared to have a regressive impact on the minds of the students, dragging them back to a more 'primitive' level. Luria here describes an inverse trajectory to that imagined in his Introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He draws conclusions which directly contradict the optimistic progressive assumptions animating his and Vygotsky's critique of Freud.

Luria then goes on to discuss results obtained during a series of experiments conducted with criminals, mostly murderers, whom he assessed shortly after their arrests. We hear of a man who killed his wife in 'order to obtain use of her things',¹⁹³ a woman who pays a neighbour 18 roubles to smash her husband's skull open and deposit his body in a pond, a man killed with a sledge-hammer whose blood splattered body is found abandoned in the snow, and the half-dressed body of a woman with a crushed head shoved into bin by a man who, after seducing her, suspected her of picking his pocket. The most bizarre case Luria describes dates from 1927 when a corpse in a basket was delivered to the main railway station in Moscow. After its discovery the husband of the murdered woman received an

¹⁸⁹ See, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 97-105.

¹⁹⁰ Luria, *Nature*, p. 57

¹⁹¹ Luria, *Nature*, p. 51

¹⁹² Luria, *Nature*, p. 53

anonymous note containing a baggage coupon informing him where ‘he might obtain his wife’.¹⁹⁴ In this instance, as no-one had confessed to the crime, Luria interviewed four suspects and the results of his experiments were used to make a conviction.

As in the purge commission experiments, he proceeded by recording reactions to a series of words, concluding that those which directly referred to the circumstances of the murder provoked the most pronounced responses. For example, in the case of the woman found half-naked in a bin the words ‘garbage’ and ‘dress’ most agitated the respondent.¹⁹⁵ His experiments are primarily designed to facilitate confession. As with the students awaiting examination, Luria declares the psychic state of the criminal as a regression to an earlier stage of development.¹⁹⁶ Luria relays these brutal acts in a detached matter-of-fact tone but it is possible to discern in Luria’s sparse descriptions of the murders the poverty and privations of NEP-era Moscow that formed the backdrop to these incidents. The strange and violent acts described in the book involve mistrust between neighbours, sexual aggression and material want. They certainly do not seem to portend the emergence of a new kind of human, free from violent impulses.

Luria has no interest in probing why people committed murder but only in whether they committed a murder. In the procedure devised by Luria, in the absence of a verbal confession, the criminal’s body gives the game away. His discussion of these cases thus focuses on the capacity for concealment, understood as a deliberate, conscious process. Luria’s discussion is based on the assumption that the criminal is primarily concerned with concealing their actions from the police, he does not engage with psychoanalytic understandings of repression or resistance. He has no interest in what motivated these gory acts, nor in their long-term psychic impact on the individuals accused of committing them. Furthermore, his emphasis on motor responses implies that a transparent relationship exists between body and mind, experience and memory. Luria’s model for understanding human behaviour allows him to observe agitation and distress but not to interpret or ameliorate it. In contrast

¹⁹³ Luria, *Nature*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁴ Luria, *Nature*, p. 109.

¹⁹⁵ Luria, *Nature*, p. 116.

to those, like Solms, who claim that Luria's work retained a psychoanalytic bent even after his public dismissal of Freud, these experiments indicate that Luria's engagement with psychoanalysis was always piecemeal and selective even before he was forced to renounce it completely.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud differentiates between a 'naive theory of shock' that treats trauma as 'direct damage to the molecular structure,' and the psychoanalytic approach which seeks to understand 'the effects produced by the breach in the shield against stimuli and by the problems that follow in its train.'¹⁹⁷ Luria's 'naive' analysis of excitation differs from Freud's in that he does not address himself to these effects and problems. His understanding also lacks any consideration of cathexis and binding, of the transformations in energy that occur when an organism's barriers are breached. By drawing on Freud's theories Luria may have been able to interpret rather than merely describe the violent actions and experiences of the people upon whom he experimented. In his clinical work in the 1920s, Luria did not deny the brutality of Soviet life but he made no attempt to discern its origins or mitigate its consequences. In this respect, Freud was far more attentive to the impact of history on human psychology.

The Nature of Human Conflicts lacks the overarching meta-historical framework that informed Luria's engagements with Freud discussed in this chapter. It therefore side-steps the uncomfortable question of how to reconcile these examples of regression and aggression with his framework for understanding the progressive movement of history. Instead, a similarly progressive model of development is transferred from the historical on to the individual, which allows Luria to acknowledge regressions as isolated deviations from a normative trajectory. Yet Luria's analysis of individual development has implications for his conceptualisation of historical development elsewhere, for the individuals he describes, by his own oft-repeated definition of human psychology, were not external to history. As he unequivocally states in 'Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology': 'Marxism sees the individual as an inseparable element of and an

¹⁹⁶ He likens the criminal to an 'idiot' and a child. Luria, *Nature...* p. 83.

¹⁹⁷ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 31.

active force in history.’¹⁹⁸ The utopian assumptions that animate his discussions of Freud, which insist that the instinctual conservatism Freud identifies are merely the ‘vestiges’ of a particular social system, is complicated by the individual cases described in *The Nature of Human Conflicts*.¹⁹⁹ In their introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Luria and Vygotsky concluded by remarking that ‘[b]ourgeois science is giving birth to materialism’.²⁰⁰ In practice, however, Luria failed to overcome the gap between ‘substance and spirit’ that he identified with the bourgeois approach.²⁰¹

Limping to the Future

History is the unity of continuity and discontinuity. Society stays alive, not despite its antagonism but by means of it.²⁰²

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

On 19th January 1918 Sabina Spielrein wrote to Jung and told him of the following dream:

I no longer dream of prison, but of new houses, airy and spacious, surrounded by many green meadows. Once I dreamed that the Gazette de Lausanne contained the following cartoon in colour: in the foreground a German general, forceful, furiously determined, energetic, and behind him the Russian [...] with his army, just like Christ, full of idealism and goodness. The Russian soldiers were listening to him, but not one of them stirs. The caption read “Why the Russians lost”. I woke up laughing, because the cartoon was most telling, and said to myself, “Do you know why the Russians lost? Because they believed too much in human goodness and other ideals and therefore dreamed instead of acting.”²⁰³

Spielrein's generation dreamed of new houses, airy and spacious, but many found themselves in prison or worse. Spielrein's brother, the prominent industrial psychologist Isaac Spielrein, was killed in Stalin's purges. She and her daughters were shot by Nazi occupying forces in her home town Rostov-on-Don in 1942. The

¹⁹⁸ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 32.

¹⁹⁹ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Introduction...’, p. 16.

²⁰⁰ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Introduction...’, p. 17.

²⁰¹ Luria, ‘Psychoanalysis...’, p. 27.

²⁰² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London; Routledge, 1973), p. 320.

Bolsheviks attempted to act on the dream of a better world. Yet, as we have seen, a stark discrepancy between dream and reality persisted, a discrepancy which continues to animate the discussions of the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In *The Future of an Illusion* Freud declared his argument was not intended as a comment on the ‘great experiment in civilization’ occurring in Russia. He was nonetheless clear that ‘every civilization must be built up on coercion and renunciation of instinct’, and dismissive of those who would argue that ‘a re-ordering of human relations’ might overcome the necessarily repressive character of civilization.²⁰⁴ As he noted in a letter in the late 1920s:

In spite of all my dissatisfaction with the present economic system I have no hope that the road pursued by the Soviets will lead to improvement. Indeed any such hope that I may have cherished had disappeared in this decade of Soviet rule.²⁰⁵

Despite Luria and Vygotsky's optimistic insistence on the transformation of human nature, the oft-repeated Soviet injunction to make sacrifices in the present in order to reap the eventual benefits of the bright Communist future has a clear correspondence to Freud's reality principle, which demands the 'temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure'.²⁰⁶ Reflecting on the 'Soviet experiment', Freud noted: 'We have been deprived by it of a hope – and an illusion – and we have received nothing in exchange.'²⁰⁷ Yet shorn of its illusions perhaps there is still some hope to be gleaned from beneath the wreckage of the Soviet experiment.

In the conclusion of his discussion of psychoanalysis, Vygotsky recalls Freud's final image from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: ‘What we cannot reach

²⁰³ Sabina Spielrein, Letter from Sabina Spielrein to Carl Jung, Carotenuto, p. 81. Spielrein references the White Army General Kerensky in the dream implying that she was sympathetic to the Whites rather than the Reds.

²⁰⁴ Freud, ‘The Future of an Illusion’, p. 7.

²⁰⁵ *Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig*, ed. by Ernst L. Freud (New York, NY; New York University Press, 1970), p. 21.

²⁰⁶ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 10. Ironically, Freud believed Russians to be essentially resistant to this form of sacrifice. He commented in a letter to Jung: 'I believe their race more than any other lacks the knack for self-inflicted drudgery.' *The Freud/Jung Letters*, ed. by William McGuire, trans. by Ralph Mannheim and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 226 cited in James L. Rice, 'Russian Stereotypes in the Freud-Jung Correspondence', *Slavic Review*, 41, 1 (Spring, 1982), p. 19.

²⁰⁷ *Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig*, p. 25.

flying we must reach limping. . . The Book tells us it is no sin to limp.²⁰⁸ Vygotsky claims that it is possible to observe beneath the limping movement of Freud's essay, the possibility of flight; a vigorous new theory might lurk within the maimed structure of psychoanalytic thought. He claims that it took a genius (Marx) to turn Hegel's idealism 'on its head, that is, to sever the methodological truth (dialectics) from the factual lies, to see Hegel, limping, was approaching the truth.'²⁰⁹ Such ingenuity, Vygotsky suggests, might similarly transform Freud. However, Vygotsky's desire to transform the limping movement of Freud's theory into unencumbered flight captures the contradiction at the heart of his and Luria's approach to Freud: they extol the dialectical qualities of psychoanalysis while simultaneously banishing them, attempting to substitute the uneven rhythm of the limp for the homogeneous equilibrium of flight. This banishes the truly dialectical element of Freud's text: its negativity. Instead, it might be desirable (or at least necessary) to retain arduous and irregular rhythm of the limp.

In a recent discussion of the composition and theoretical genesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, based on analysis of a hitherto unexamined early draft of Freud's essay, Ulrike May suggests that one of the major motivations for conceiving of the existence of the death drive was Freud's increasing preoccupation with the limits of psychoanalytic practice. May reads *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as 'a theoretical turning point, at whose core lies a new conceptualisation of the efficacy of psychoanalysis'.²¹⁰ In her compelling account the death drive emerges from Freud's struggle to reconcile theory with practice. This chapter has identified a gap between the progressive theoretical framework proposed by Luria in his readings of Freud and his clinical observations of the same period. Unlike Freud, however, Luria did not revise his theoretical model on the basis of his empirical observations. Perhaps doing so would have enabled him to develop a theory committed to revolutionary practice that was also capable of acknowledging its limitations and failures, perhaps even of acknowledging the potentially generative capacities of the oppositions, negations and regressions that animate *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

²⁰⁸ Al-Hariri cited in Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 64. Vygotsky discusses this in 'Crisis in Psychology', p. 261.

²⁰⁹ Vygotsky, 'Crisis in Psychology', p. 261.

After all, Freud did not simply abandon psychoanalytic work in the face of his increasing ‘therapeutic pessimism’.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Ulrike May, ‘The Third Step in Drive Theory: On the Genesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,’ *Psychoanalysis and History*, 17, 2 (2015), 205-272, p. 219. Thanks to Matt Ffytche for sharing this article with me prior to its publication.

²¹¹ May, p. 219.

Chapter 2

The 'Primitive': Between Emancipation and Domination

The beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.¹

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852

New times demand new people. In the Soviet Union, new people are coming into being.²

Langston Hughes, *A Negro Looks at Central Asia*, 1934

Humanity imagines there is nothing in the desert, that it is merely somewhere boring and wild where a sad shepherd lies half-asleep in the dark above a muddy sunken plain on which human tragedies once unfolded - and that even these have now run their course [...] Here by the Amu-Darya, however, as well as in Sary-Kamysh, there existed an entire, difficult world, caught up in a destiny of its own.³

Andrei Platonov, *Soul*, 1935

¹ Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works, vol. 11* (New York, NY; International Publishers, 1979), trans. by Clemens Dutt, pp. 99-197, p. 104.

² Langston Hughes, *A Negro Looks at Central Asia* (Moscow International Publishers, 1934) p. 40 cited in Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 2002), p. 95.

³ Andrey Platonov, *Soul*, trans. by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler and Olga Emerson, with Jane Chamberlain, Olga Kouznetsova and Eric Naiman (London; Harvill Press, 2003), pp. 46-47.

Introduction

In 1931 and 1932, Alexander Luria led two psychological expeditions to Soviet Central Asia. He hoped to trace the changes in thought he assumed would accompany the social alterations wrought by the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), the Soviet Union's 'second revolution'.⁴ Luria hoped that this moment of rapid social upheaval would provide him with the material to support his theoretical insistence on the historical contingency of human thought. He described his experiments as

a statement of the fundamental shifts that had occurred in human consciousness during a vigorous realignment of social history – the rapid realignment of a class society and a cultural upheaval creating hitherto unimagined perspectives for social development.⁵

The experiments set out to show that thought structures were tied to material conditions, framing psychology as a 'science of social history'.⁶ Moreover, Luria intended to show that increased literacy levels, new forms of collective labour and exposure to modern technology not only changed but improved people's thought processes, introducing the capacity for abstract thought and thus prompting an ascent to a more advanced cognitive stage:

studying not only the peculiarities of psychological processes but, what is more important, the very dynamics of the transition from the more elementary psychological laws to the more complex processes [...] connected with socialistic growth.⁷

Vygotsky, who was involved in the conception of the project but too ill to travel with the group, heralded the study as an unprecedented investigation of 'historical phylogeny', in which a cultural transformation that would ordinarily occur over many generations could be witnessed on the ontogenetic level, in the lifetime of an individual.⁸

⁴ Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (London; Penguin, 1968), p. 296.

⁵ A.R. Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, trans. by Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 19.

⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 12.

⁷ A.R. Luria, 'The Second Psychological Expedition to Central Asia,' *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 44 (1934), pp. 255-259, p. 255.

⁸ Vygotsky to Luria, August 1 1931, cited in Elena Luria, *Moi Otets: A.R. Luria [My Father: A.R. Luria]* (Moscow; Gnosis, 1994), p. 61. The historically unprecedented character of the experiments (and, implicitly, the First Five Year Plan) is echoed in a letter Luria sent to Horace Kallen, see, Luria to Kallen, October 28 1931, Cincinnati, OH, American Jewish Archives (AJA), Horace Kallen Papers, MS-1, Box 19, Folder 18.

Luria's expeditions, funded by a range of state-run institutions, were part of a flow of experts from a range of disciplines who travelled from Russia's Western metropolitan centres to remote parts of the Soviet Union as emissaries of the revolution.⁹ The Central Asian expeditions were Luria's most explicitly political endeavour; an attempt to demonstrate the cognitive benefits of collectivisation. Yet despite his declared allegiance with the grand Stalinist project, Luria's work in Central Asia was denounced in the Soviet Union. David Joravsky characterises the attacks on Luria as part of the 'vituperative spirit of the 1930s.'¹⁰ Luria's research papers were taken for examination by The Culture and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (*Kult'prop*) as part of a larger inspection of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow. Following the investigation, he was accused of 'all mortal sins' including racism, colonialism and an over reliance on 'bourgeois' Western theories.¹¹ Luria reflected that this was part of a project to discredit him as a scientist committed to the Soviet cause. He wrote to the People's Commissar for Education to plead his case, explaining that the judgments against him had been based on research in its 'raw form' and interpreted without any understanding of the methodologies or intentions of the project.¹² This was to no avail: the experiments were declared harmful to the construction of a national culture in Uzbekistan. In the words of one ideologue:

This pseudo-scientific, anti-Marxist and class-hostile theory in practice leads to the anti-Soviet conclusion that the policy of the Soviet Union is being accomplished by people and classes who think primitively, who are incapable of any abstract thinking, which, it goes without saying, is utterly at odds with reality.¹³

As Raymond Bauer discusses, the wild accelerationist pace of the First Five Year Plan was accompanied by a new intolerance for any acknowledgement of a gap

⁹ On state-funded artistic projects undertaken during the First Five Year Plan, see Maria Gough, 'Radical Tourism: Sergei Tret'iakov at the Communist Lighthouse', *October*, 118 (2006), 159–178. On 'communist missionaries' from other disciplines, see 'The Conquerers of Backwardness', Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 187-300. Luria's expeditions were backed by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Uzbek Socialist Republic and the Government of Uzbekistan. See, Luria, 'Second Psychological Expedition...', p. 255.

¹⁰ Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1989), p. 365. See also, Alexei Kozulin, *Psychology in Utopia: Toward a Social History of Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1984), p. 110.

¹¹ E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 67

¹² E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 67

between the imperfect present and the communist future. Although Luria was enthusiastically attempting to trace positive changes in consciousness, his experiments still described communism as a work in progress, whereas psychologists' findings were now expected to describe the already realised ideal Soviet subject.¹⁴

The eventual suppression of this research should not, however, obscure the extent to which Luria and his team were active and enthusiastic participants in the Soviet project. Indeed, despite describing the 'backwardness' of Uzbek people who had not yet been exposed to the new forms of life being ushered in by the First Five Year Plan, Luria insisted that dramatic changes in thought processes could already be observed in Central Asia. He declared the situation 'a genuine revolution in cognitive activity',¹⁵ describing a psychic upheaval as transformative as the political shifts to which it was tied. Luria wrote excitedly to the American anthropologist Melville Herskovits in 1932:

We have in the USSR extremely interesting and happy conditions to study the process of very deep and very quick changes in the psychological processes of the periphic [*sic*] nations. The process of collectivization of economic forms and industrialisation, the socialistic reconstruction of life does involve real changes in the mind.¹⁶

Paradoxically, however, Luria conceived of the imposition of a particular mode of life and thought as a form of liberation. For Luria, the transition to abstract thinking did not represent a process of assimilation but of emancipation. Only by developing the capacity to think abstractly would Uzbek people be capable of actively shaping historical development, but if psychology, as Luria claimed, is a science of social history then these utopian notions should be understood in the fraught and increasingly brutal historical context in which his experiments were conducted. In

¹³ Razmayslov, 'O Kulturno-istoricheskoi teorii' Vygotskogo i Luriiia' ['On the Cultural-Historical Theory of Vygotsky and Luria'] *Kniga i proletarskaia revolutsiia*, 4 (1934), 82-84 cited in Joravsky, p. 365, p. 367.

¹⁴ See, Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 107-114. The shift in psychology that accompanied the onset of the First Five Year Plan had counterparts across disciplinary fields. As Loren Graham declares: 'The greatest change in scientific establishment of the Soviet Union occurred in the years of the Cultural Revolution, 1928-31'. Loren Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 93.

¹⁵ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. vi.

¹⁶ Luria to Herskovits, April 19 1932, Chicago, Northwestern University Archives (NUA), Melville J. Herskovits Papers, General, 1906-1942, Box 13, Folder 4, 1931-1935.

the 1920s, as discussed in Chapter 1, Luria's theoretical frameworks were already unable to account for historical reality. This contradiction became starker in the period of the First Five Year Plan when brutality of the Soviet regime increased.

In *Negative Dialectics* Theodor Adorno describes the antagonism between consciousness and the existing state of things in the following terms:

The power of the *status quo* puts up facades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them [...] Where the thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance – there is its freedom.¹⁷

This statement captures a tension inherent in Luria's research project in Central Asia. On the one hand, he presented abstract thinking as something that enabled people to smash through the barriers that constitute the *status quo*. Yet his research practices and assumptions about Uzbek culture undermined these proclamations by operating with and even helping to construct these facades. Drawing on Lenin, Luria described human psychology as a 'reflection' of social reality.¹⁸ This chapter will trace the history of these psychological experiments to ask whether Luria's research provides a mirror image of its Stalinist context or whether his conceptual framework might have been capable of crashing through the glass.

Psychology as Social History

There is a marked dissonance between the time in which Luria wrote his report on the expeditions to Central Asia (published in Russian in 1974 and in English in 1976) and the time in which he conducted the experiments.¹⁹ Following the expeditions, short bulletins appeared in contemporary English-language journals,²⁰ but due to the suppression of this research in the Soviet Union, a book-length account of the experiments did not emerge for more than forty years. Luria

¹⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York, NY; Continuum, 1973), p. 17.

¹⁸ See, V.I. Lenin, 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism' (1908), *Collected Works*, vol. 14 (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 137.

¹⁹ For the Russian original see, A.R. Luria, *Ob istoricheskoy razvitiy poznavatel'nykh protsessov* [*On the Historical Development of Cognitive Processes*] (Moscow; Nauka, 1974).

²⁰ See, Luria, 'Psychological expedition to Central Asia' *Science*, 74 (1931), 383-384, Luria, 'Psychological Expedition to Central Asia,' *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 40, 1 (1932), 241-242, Luria, 'The second Psychological Expedition to Central Asia', *Science*, 78 (1933), 191-192, Luria, 'The second Psychological Expedition to Central Asia', *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 44 (1934), 255-259.

concludes that text with the pronouncement: 'In the past forty years, a backward remote region has become an economically and socially developed part of our socialist state.'²¹ The political moment of Brezhnev stagnation, when communism seemed stable and assured, was a stark contrast to the years of rapid and violent change ushered in by the First Five Year Plan, during which the experiments were conducted.

The contemporary accounts of Gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka, who accompanied the second expedition to Central Asia in 1932, capture some of the enthusiasm he encountered in the Soviet Union. Upon arrival in Moscow a grand reception was thrown where Sergei Eisenstein's paean to collectivisation, *The General Line* was introduced by the director, who had recently returned to Russia from a sojourn in the West. Luria had written to Eisenstein in Hollywood to inform him of the insights gained on the first expedition, framing the research as a major breakthrough: 'Just think: what we assumed to be natural psychological processes (such as perception, comparison, association) are now revealed to be HISTORICAL, built in various stages of development! This is a big shift in psychology.'²² In Moscow, Koffka claims that the atmosphere among the Soviet psychologists was 'extremely lively and optimistic. One seems to feel the joint effort of everybody proud of what has been achieved, and is being done, now, and planned for the future.'²³ Koffka's notes on the 1932 expedition bluntly state that he was informed by an Uzbek representative in Moscow: 'Nothing achieved by force.'²⁴ It is, however, unlikely that Luria and his colleagues were oblivious to the brutal means by which collectivisation was achieved.²⁵ Indeed, affirmation of the necessity of violence was often voiced in official Communist Party documents and in the press. Luria's own biography attests that he was soon to experience the uncompromising wrath of the

²¹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 164.

²² Luria to Eisenstein, July 7 1931, Moscow, The Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (RGALI), Sergei Eisenstein Papers, 123-2-11301/2-69.

²³ Molly Harrower, *Kurt Koffka: An Unwitting Self-Portrait* (Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p. 146. Harrower was Koffka's research assistant. This volume includes their correspondence during his time in Central Asia. Harrower continued to correspond with Luria about her own research after Koffka's death in 1941.

²⁴ Akron, Ohio, Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP), Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M379, 'Lectures Misc'.

²⁵ Thanks to Tatiana Akhutina, a former student and collaborator of Luria's, for making this observation when I presented an early version of this material at the International Society for Cultural

regime first-hand. This might be difficult to reconcile with the atmosphere of excitement and optimism Koffka described but it is precisely the *coexistence* of enthusiasm with violence that this chapter will attempt to confront.

Uwe Gielen and Samvel Jeshmaridian have attacked Luria's experiments in Central Asia for their complicity with Stalinism, insisting on the importance of acknowledging that Luria and Vygotsky 'lived in an era when millions of people starved to death, were sent to labour camps, were murdered'.²⁶ In advancing this argument the authors cite statistics from a single source: Robert Conquest's controversial *Harvest of Sorrow*. This book not only deals with regions of the Soviet Union that Luria did not visit²⁷ where famine was most acute and peasant resistance most intense, but was published before the post-Soviet 'archive revolution' and subsequently revised by the author himself.²⁸ Glen and Jeshmaridian's article relies on juxtaposing de-contextualised numbers and harrowing descriptions of the famine induced by collectivisation in Ukraine and Kazakhstan with explicitly ideological statements by Luria and Vygotsky.

The authors are correct to observe that the psychologists' relation to Soviet history has been overlooked by most Western secondary literature. However, by reducing the nuances and textures of that history to the worst excesses of Stalinism

and Activity Research's 4th International Summer University in Povedniki, Russian Federation, July 2013.

²⁶ Uwe Gielen and Samvel Jeshmaridian, 'Lev Vygotsky: The Man and the Era', *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 28, 3/4 (1999), 273-301, p. 276. Though less condemnatory, a similarly bemused account of Luria's relation to collectivisation which also relies primarily on Conquest is given in René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1991), pp. 243-246.

²⁷ For discussions of collectivisation in the Uzbek SSR, see, R. Aminova, *Changes in Uzbekistan's Agriculture, 1917-1929*, trans. V.A. Epshtein and B.N. Lunkov (Moscow; Nauka Publishing House, 1974), Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport; Praeger Publishers, 2001), pp. 175-211 and Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia* (Armonk, NY; ME Sharpe, 1982).

²⁸ Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1986). For a useful overview of the historiography of the famine that accompanied collectivisation and Conquest's place within those debates, see: Andrea Graziosi, 'The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 27, 1/4 (2004-2005), 97-115. Major accounts of collectivisation that focus primarily on Russia and Ukraine include: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1994), Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (New York and London; W.W. Norton and Co., 1975) and Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1996).

they do little to illuminate the nature of that relation. Instead, their analysis imagines Stalinism as a phenomenon so extreme and monolithic that it defies human comprehension, which thus seals it off from proper scrutiny. Slavoj Žižek's discussion of the limitations of 'totalitarianism' as a hermeneutic tool is apposite here:

[T]he notion of 'totalitarianism', far from being an effective theoretical concept, is a kind of stopgap: instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire a new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively prevents us from thinking.²⁹

Žižek's remarks suggest that in order to think through the period of the First Five Year Plan it is necessary to prise history open and probe its contradictory contents. Moshe Lewin identifies this confrontation with contradiction as one of the fundamental problems faced by historians of the Stalin era:

That a progressive ideology, initially intended to enhance human freedom and to create higher forms of community, came to serve a police state is one of the peculiarities of the period and an important phenomenon to study.³⁰

This is not a comfortable endeavour. However, to make sense of Luria's project and its relation to Stalinism, as Alexei Kozulin observes, we must take his commitment to the Soviet cause seriously.³¹ Susan Reid has convincingly demonstrated in the field of the visual arts, that Western narratives of Soviet intellectuals as a 'browbeaten bunch' meekly kowtowing to the Soviet authorities, fail to account for the animated and committed attempts to engage with and implement state policy in different fields.³² Neither is it helpful to suggest, as Gielen and Jeshmaridian risk doing, that support for collectivisation was simply equivalent to the advocacy of mass murder.

Attending closely to the historical situation in which Luria conducted his experiments makes it possible to explore the uncomfortable tension between emancipation and domination, enthusiasm and violence inherent in his project.

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions on the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London; Verso, 2011), p. 3.

³⁰ Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (London; Methuen, 1985), p. 210.

³¹ 'One cannot do justice to Luria and his generation without recognising their sincerity.' Kozulin, p. 15.

³² Susan E. Reid, 'Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The Industry of Socialism Art Exhibition', 1935-41, *Russian Review*, 60, 2 (2001), 153-184, p. 161.

Gielen and Jeshmaridian claim that Luria's Marxist convictions 'blinded' him to the inhumanity of Stalinism, implying a neat disjunction between abstract concepts and concrete reality in which the former serve to blot out the latter. But they fail to discuss the theoretical questions at stake in Luria's own research which explicitly foregrounded the *relationship* between the abstract and the concrete. They take Luria's positive proclamations about the First Five Year Plan as evidence of his complicity with Stalinism without examining in any detail the methodologies and approaches he adopted in Central Asia. Yet it is here that the tension between domination and emancipation played out.

Luria is alleged to have telegraphed Vygotsky from Samarkand saying simply: 'The Uzbeks have no illusions!' The story goes that this message, which Luria intended as a summary of his research findings, was intercepted by Soviet authorities and interpreted as a condemnation of collectivisation.³³ Regardless of the veracity of this anecdote, the statement does encapsulate how Luria characterised Uzbek thought. Ironically, the lack of illusions that Luria identified in Uzbek people was precisely what he hoped could be overcome through the transition to the socialism. For Luria, illusion, fantasy and imagination were all crucial components of advanced thinking. In a letter to the Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler in the wake of the 1931 expedition he noted: 'illusions seem to be a function of a culturally highly developed psyche'.³⁴

Luria saw the development of 'higher' forms of thought as the fundamental psychological question. In Central Asia, Luria intended to trace the transition from concrete to abstract thought which he assumed would accompany the social and economic changes taking place. This transformation was for him indicative of cultural progress, as he assumed that 'a person capable of abstract thought reflects

³³ There are various versions of this anecdote in circulation. Elena Luria quotes a lecture given by her father in 1974 that refers to this incident without, however, mentioning any political repercussions. In an oblique footnote she adds: 'This telegram, which was deliberately misinterpreted by their enemies, got Luria and Vygotsky into a lot of trouble.' *Moi Otets*, p. 62. Homskaya refers to this 'notoriously famous telegram', Evgenia D. Homskaya, *Alexander Romanovich Luria: A Scientific Biography*, trans. by Daria Krotova (New York, Plenum Press, 2001), p. 26. Eli Lamdan suggests the episode may be apocryphal. See, Eli Lamdan, 'Who had illusions? Alexander R. Luria's Central Asian Experiments on Optical Illusions', *Dubna Psychological Journal*, 3 (2013), 66-76, p. 71.

³⁴ Luria to Köhler, July 3 1931, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society (APS), Wolfgang Köhler Papers, Series I. Correspondence, Mss.B.K815.

the external world more profoundly and completely'.³⁵ Luria's interest in abstract thinking was shared by numerous psychologists of the period. Abstraction, similarly defined as the ability to classify and order information into pre-determined categories, was also central to the work of the German neurologist Kurt Goldstein, for example. Anne Harrington argues that Goldstein's discussions of the capacity for abstract thinking in the 1920s and early 1930s, which he viewed as integral to human freedom, were imbued with a particular culturally-specific political meaning: 'a reflection of his own liberal hopes for Germany.'³⁶ In Luria's work abstract thinking was also linked to freedom, and the two authors shared a connection to the German idealist and romantic traditions discussed by Harrington, but Luria did not couch his discussions in the liberal rhetoric of choice favoured by Goldstein. Instead, Luria's writings tethered the capacity for abstract thought to communist hopes for the Soviet Union.

According to Luria, abstract thinking allows people to classify objects on the basis of an object's general features, which made it possible for people to think beyond the confines of their immediate experiences:

The appearance of verbal and logical codes enabling one to abstract the essential features of objects and thus assign these objects to general categories [...] and permits conclusions to be drawn from given premises without having to resort to immediate graphic-functional experience.³⁷

The transition from concrete to abstract thinking, which he also described as a transition from the sensory to the rational, is, he declares: 'a phenomenon that the classics of Marxism regarded as one of the most important in history.'³⁸ Typically, Luria's reference to the 'classics of Marxism' is unspecific. However, although he does not mention Lenin by name, Luria's conception of abstract thinking is consistent with Lenin's discussion of scientific abstraction outlined in his 'Conspectus on Hegel's Logic':

Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract [...] does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely.

³⁵ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 100.

³⁶ Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 154.

³⁷ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, pp. 100-101.

³⁸ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 101.

From living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice,—such is the dialectical path of cognition of truth, of cognition of objective reality.³⁹

For Luria, as for Lenin, abstracting from nature does not drive a wedge between people and the world but allows them to understand it more fully.

Luria's celebration of abstract thinking was combined with a scientific methodology that also operated with abstractions: his methodology relied on ordering, classifying and categorising. This chapter contends that by assigning Uzbek people to pre-determined general categories, Luria's work did not succeed in reflecting their nature more deeply, truly and completely in the manner he intended. In attending to the ambivalent qualities of Luria's research the argument of this chapter is similarly ambivalent, oscillating between sympathy with Luria's intentions and criticism of his methodologies. In contrast to Gielen and Jeshmaridian's unqualified condemnation, this approach is an attempt to trace the uncomfortable contradictions that characterised Luria's project rather than seeking to resolve them.

Revolution as Evolution

'The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action', proclaims Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.⁴⁰ A new calendar was introduced after the French Revolution. Calendars, Benjamin claims, do not march blindly forwards without a backward glance; they contain the past in the form of recurring holidays, which commemorate significant historical events. Clocks, on the other hand, are 'monuments of a historical consciousness', which, Benjamin argues, has not been acknowledged since the July Revolution, when several clock-towers in

³⁹ V.I. Lenin, 'Conspectus on Hegel's Book The Science of Logic', *Collected Works*, vol. 38 (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), pp. 85-244, p. 171. Vygotsky discusses this passage from Lenin's notes on Hegel in 'Development of Thinking and Formation of Concepts in the Adolescent', *The Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky*, Vol. 5, trans. by Marie J. Hall, ed. by Robert W. Rieber (New York, NY; Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 29-82, p. 79. Luria discusses Lenin's theories of abstraction in *Making of Mind*, pp. 177-178.

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-1940, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389-400, p. 395.

Paris were simultaneously and spontaneously shot at, symbolically shattering the apparently inexorable and ordinarily inaudible tick-tock of historical progress.⁴¹

Following the October Revolution, the Soviet Union switched from the Gregorian to the Julian calendar, thus synchronising itself with the Capitalist world. New commemorative holidays and national rituals were quickly introduced. In the years of the First Five Year Plan a special calendar reform committee was set up, which advocated adopting a new 'Red' calendar counting 1917 as Year Zero.⁴² A new working week was introduced in factories to maximise productivity, with workers scheduled to work overlapping shifts with irregular rest days to ensure production never halted.⁴³ Stalinist time may have flowed evenly in one direction but, like a racing heart-beat, the tempo dangerously increased.

Susan Buck-Morss distinguishes between two conflicting temporalities at work in the time of the revolution: *avant garde* (the time of art) and vanguard (the time of politics).⁴⁴ While the former was intent on smashing time, destroying tradition and interrupting the continuum of history, the latter was concerned with propelling the masses forwards into a better future. In harnessing itself to the state, she argues, art lost its radical force:

art was no longer to inspire imagination in a way that set reality into question but, rather, to stage affirmative representations of reality that encouraged an uncritical acceptance of the party's monopolistic right to control the direction of social transformation.⁴⁵

When outlining the goals of their experiments, Luria explicitly adopted a developmental framework compatible with the 'vanguard' temporality of the Communist Party. This unidirectional understanding of historical progress sat uneasily alongside his discussions of the temporal horizons he claims were opened

⁴¹ Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 395.

⁴² See, Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Cultural Revolution as Class War' in *Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-1931* ed. by Fitzpatrick (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 31.

⁴³ See, William Chase and Lewis Siegelbaum, 'Worktime and Industrialization in the U.S.S.R., 1917-1941' in *Worktime and Industrialisation: An International History* ed. by Gary Cross (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 183-216.

⁴⁴ Buck-Morss's two times roughly coincide with what Vladimir Papernyi describes as 'Culture One' and 'Culture Two'. See, Vladimir Papernyi, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2000), p. 62.

up by the transition from concrete to abstract modes of thought accompanying such progress, which have more in common with the transformative and discontinuous temporality of the *avant garde*. According to Luria, Uzbek people were not not being passively carried up the steps of pre-existing universal time into the modern present. Instead, through education and social transformation, they would acquire the ability to actively create an as yet undetermined future, which might still open up the possibility of setting these very temporal structures into question, declaring:

Consciousness is the highest form of reflection of reality: it is, moreover, not given in advance, unchanging and passive, but shaped by activity and used by human beings to orient themselves to their environment, *not only by adapting to conditions but in restructuring them*.⁴⁶

In planning the Central Asian expeditions, Luria identified the simultaneous co-existence of groups at various ‘stages’ of development.⁴⁷ A loosely Marxist conception of history as advancing teleologically through a series of economic stages, was combined with the Leninist conviction that such development could be artificially accelerated, conforming to what Francine Hirsch describes as ‘state-sponsored evolutionism’.⁴⁸ Vygotsky wrote an essay on the expeditions, which resounded with phrases snatched from the approved repertoire, in which he declared:

Instead of the colonial approach to the cultural development of backward peoples adopted [...] in the capitalist world, this proposes completely new conditions for the development of a single socialist culture in different national forms.⁴⁹

Luria similarly declared that collectivisation would propel supposedly 'backward' people swiftly forwards, to make a ‘leap of centuries’.⁵⁰ This was consistent with the Stalinist rhetoric that sought to make the USSR ‘national in form, socialist in content’ and also kept pace with the breathless tempo that characterised the era.

⁴⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 8 (my emphasis).

⁴⁷ The ‘law of development by stages’ [*po zakonu stadial'nosti*] was influenced by Engels’s discussion of prehistoric societies. He claimed that human society progressed from savagery to barbarism to civilization, a movement he compared to the evolutionary transition from ape to human. See, Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York, NY; Pathfinder Press, 1972), pp. 47-54. Hegel’s assertion in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* that history moved from East to West is also relevant to these debates.

⁴⁸ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 96. See, Lenin, ‘Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism’, *Collected Works, Vol. 22*, trans. by Yuri Sdobnikov (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), pp. 185-304.

⁴⁹ Vygotsky, ‘K voprosu o plane nauchno-issledovatel'skoi raboty po pedologii natsional'nykh men'shinstv’, [‘On the Question of the Scientific Research Plan for the Pedology of the National Minorities’] *Pedologiya*, 3 (1929), 367-377, p. 367.

Following a strictly class-based analysis was not possible in the Soviet Union, particularly in places like Central Asia without a sizeable urban industrial proletariat. This issue animated debates in the Kremlin and also impacted Luria's research. He chose to focus on five groups of people, all of whom were viewed as potential beneficiaries of Soviet power (categorised by the state as '*bedniaks*' or poor peasants), rather than those designated class enemies:

1. Illiterate '*ichkari*' women in remote villages 'who were not involved in any modern social activities' (The term '*ichkari*', meaning women's quarters, was used to refer to veiled women secluded within the home)
2. Illiterate peasants, living in remote villages who were in no way involved with socialized labour and maintained the old economic way of life
3. Women who attended short-term courses in the teaching of pre-school children (with no formal schooling and almost no training in literacy)
4. Active *kolhoz* (collective farm) workers and young people with considerable experience in planning production, distributing labour, and taking stock of output but barely literate
5. Women students admitted to teaching school after two or three years of study.⁵¹

Koffka's notes reveal that he interviewed an even broader range of participants, including miners and cooperative workers.⁵² These categorisations take into account a range of interlocking factors including occupation, educational level, gender, age and place of residence. Koffka's notes also discuss the Uzbek counterparts that were sought for figures demonised in the Russian context: '*bai*' (or rich man) became a synonym for '*kulak*', '*dehqon*' for '*krest'ian*' (peasant), mullah for priest.⁵³ The bagginess of the terms used to categorise groups of people (both by Soviet officials and Luria's team of researchers) is an example of the multifarious ways in which the concrete continued to trouble the abstract.

⁵⁰ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 164.

⁵¹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 15. The same list appears in Luria to Köhler, July 3 1931, APS, Wolfgang Köhler Papers, Series I, Correspondence, Mss.B.K815.

⁵² Koffka's notes contain tables listing the age, ethnicity and jobs of the people he interviewed. See, AHAP, Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M377, Folder 'Uzbekistan'.

⁵³ AHAP, Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M377, Folder 'Uzbekistan'.

Luria followed the Communist Party line, conceiving of his work in explicitly anti-imperialist terms and insisted that psychological propensities were not biologically determined.⁵⁴ Luria's rejection of biological essentialism was, however, coupled with a continued emphasis on cultural superiority framed in terms of historical development; a hierarchical framework that undermined his professed egalitarianism. Despite defining itself as anti-imperialist, his progressive framework for understanding Uzbek society bore comparison to the frameworks employed by Western anthropologists, whose work he drew on heavily.⁵⁵ Luria frequently drew crude parallels between Uzbekistan and other supposedly 'backward' places, including other regions of the USSR as well as communities in Africa.⁵⁶ For all his self-proclaimed attentiveness to cultural specificity his emphasis on the interchangeability of 'backward' places understood cultural difference in terms of temporal development.

Johannes Fabian makes the sweeping claim that anthropology, borrowing from evolutionary theory (that was contemporaneous with its emergence as a discipline), naturalises time, removing it from history. For the anthropologist, relations between places are understood as relations between times; spatial dispersal is transformed into temporal sequence. Such schemas appear inclusive and universal, but are founded on hierarchical separation. Anthropological time, true to its colonial origins, transforms horizontal difference in space into the vertical difference of time, thus justifying a logic of domination. Rendering space as time, according to Fabian,

⁵⁴ Historians disagree about the extent to which Soviet rule in Central Asia, contrary to party rhetoric, actually represented a continuity with the Tsarist Russian Empire. For an example of an account stressing continuities see, Edward Allworth, *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule* (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 1989). For a counter example which stresses the novelty of the Soviet project see, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ See particularly, Luria and Vygotsky, 'Primitive Man and His Behaviour' (1930) in *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Know (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), pp. 79-139. Luria attempted to invite the Austrian anthropologist Richard Thurnwald to accompany the expedition in 1932. See, Luria to Köhler, July 3 1931, APS, Wolfgang Köhler Papers, Series I. Correspondence, Mss.B.K815. Although Luria framed his work in dialogue with Western anthropology, there is no evidence that he was directly in contact with the Soviet anthropological community, despite their overlapping concerns and assumptions. The lack of existing cross-cultural psychological experimentation drew Luria to anthropological texts, and he did not discuss the methodological discrepancies between the disciplines.

⁵⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 42 (on parallels with research into the perception of Zulu people). In a letter to Kurt Lewin Luria suggests that he is considering undertaking work in the Caucasus, Central Asia or Siberia implying that the inhabitants of those places will have cognitive similarities. Luria to Lewin, July 12 1929, AHAP, Kurt Lewin Papers, Box M2931, Folder 1.

allows anthropologists to veil their qualitative judgments behind an apparently neutral, universal and natural abstract structure. Although there were specific ideas in the Soviet context about where ‘backward’ traits originated and how they might be eradicated, the projected dichotomy Fabian identifies between ‘progress, development, modernity,’ on the one hand, and ‘stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition’ on the other, is evident in Luria’s attitudes to Central Asia which similarly applied temporal frameworks to coeval societies.⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of the ‘violence of imperialist epistemic, social, and disciplinary inscription’, which treats its objects of investigation as a deviation from an ideal might also be applied to Luria’s research (although in Luria’s case the ideal was situated in the future).⁵⁸ Despite insisting that no way of seeing is ‘a natural and inevitable achievement of the human mind’, Luria’s understanding of difference displayed precisely the ‘ferocious standardising benevolence’⁵⁹ Spivak describes: by distributing humanity across one developmental slope, his analysis was implicitly value-laden. For Luria, to borrow Yuri Slezkine’s phrases: ‘otherness was understood as nothing but backwardness’,⁶⁰ ‘difference implied hierarchy’.⁶¹ For Luria, Uzbeks were not simply different but in some sense ‘worse’. In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Jack Goody praises Luria’s work in Central Asia for drawing the conclusion that logic is based on ‘highly artificial assumptions’, but Goody overlooks Luria’s assumption that even if there was not necessarily a more ‘natural’ solution to the problems posed in the experiments there was still a ‘better’ one.⁶² Luria placed Uzbek people, culturally if not biologically, lower on the rungs of a single developmental ladder.

Luria and Koffka’s personal accounts are pervaded by conflicting notions of

⁵⁷ See, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, NY; Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 144.

⁵⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossman (Houndsmills; Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313, p. 285.

⁵⁹ Spivak, p. 294. For a discussion of the application of post-colonial theory to the Soviet and Post-Soviet context see, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nancy Condee, Harsha Ram and Vitaly Chernetsky, ‘Are We Post-Colonial? Post-Soviet Space’, *Modern Language Association*, 21, 3, (2006), 828-836 and David Chioni Moore, ‘Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique’, *PMLA*, 116, 1 (2001), 111-128.

⁶⁰ Yuri Slezkine, ‘From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938’, *Slavic Review*, 51, 1 (1992), 52-76, p. 57.

⁶¹ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, p. 387.

time. Luria writes that ‘the masses had lived for centuries in economic stagnation and illiteracy’,⁶³ suggesting that Soviet intervention would not merely speed up the progress of history but introduce history as such for the first time. Uzbeks were imagined to inhabit the past, but this past was apparently static, timeless. Upon arrival in Central Asia, Luria described an arid, monotonous and desolate landscape populated with Uzbek people with ‘immovable faces’ and ‘motionless’ eyes.⁶⁴ Psychologically, meanwhile, Uzbek people were said to exist in a perennially frozen now, incapable of conceptualising the future. In conformity with Edward Said’s seminal analysis, Luria treats ‘the Orient’ itself as ‘an ideal and unchanging abstraction’ outside the dynamics of history.⁶⁵ As Frantz Fanon noted of the French attitude to Algeria: the local people, ‘the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels make up the landscape, the *natural* background’ to the properly historical presence of the European.⁶⁶

Orientalist tropes abound in Luria’s personal impressions of Uzbekistan, all ancient ‘whimsical’ music, exotic smells and bustling bazaars which he compares to Baghdad.⁶⁷ Koffka’s private letters indulge in similarly sentimental flourishes, adopting the idiom of the colonial adventure story, casting himself as the intrepid traveller boldly penetrating ‘that vast expanse of night and scent, of softness and mystery’, an exotic and eroticised feminine landscape lying supine before him.⁶⁸ He described one of his guides as ‘quite medieval’ and penned a poem in English for inclusion in the expedition’s newspaper, which wistfully reflects on the inscrutability of the steppe.⁶⁹ Koffka also expresses disappointment that Uzbekistan does not

⁶² See, Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 11.

⁶³ Alexander Luria, *Cultural Development*, p. vi.

⁶⁴ Luria, Diary entry May 7 1931 cited in E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, pp. 58-59

⁶⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY; Random Books, 1978), p. 8. For a discussion of the applicability of Said’s definition of Orientalism to the Russian Empire see the debate between Adeeb Khalid, Nathaniel Knight and Maria Todorova in *Kritika*, 1, 4 (2000), 691-727.

One of the major complications that arises when importing this model into the Soviet context is that Russia itself was also often imagined as ‘Asiatic’ and backward in contrast to Western Europe. Trotsky, for example, referred to the ‘“lazy” mind of the Muscovites [which] was a reflection of the slow tempo of economic development, the formlessness of class relations, the meagerness of inner history.’ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. by Max Eastman (New York, NY; Pathfinder, 1980), pp. 3-4.

⁶⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London; Penguin, 2001), p. 201. In a particularly florid diary entry on 14th May 1931 Luria mentions both veiled women and camels, see, E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ See the sections of Luria’s diary from Central Asia reproduced in E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, pp. 59-60

⁶⁸ Harrower, p. 158.

consistently conform to his ideal romantic stereotype of the East, opining:

Often in my youth had I dreamed of a journey to the East, of lying in the harbour of Port Said, the gate to all wonders of Asia. This was different. No proud ships, no glamorous Eastern port; a very commonplace car in a drab landscape of stunted firs and sand.⁷⁰

Although these experiments were conceived as part of a project to celebrate and encourage modernisation and rapid change, Koffka expresses dissatisfaction that Uzbekistan is too familiar, insufficiently trapped in a mystical, imagined past.

Luria's interest in Central Asia continued throughout his life. In 1964 he sent Jerome Bruner a postcard of a Medieval mosque from a holiday in Samarkand saying he was enjoying the 'city of dreams'.⁷¹ Luria frequently presented Western visitors with traditional gifts from Central Asia⁷² and his Moscow apartment was decorated with hand-woven Uzbek carpets.⁷³ Koffka's research assistant Molly Harrower recalled that on a visit to the USA in 1960 Luria insisted that she dress up in the traditional Uzbek outfit they had sent to her from the 1932 expedition.⁷⁴ Luria, however, was more positive than Koffka about the changes that had occurred in Central Asia, noting in a postcard to Horace Kallen in 1932 that 'old Asian art and new forms of life' are combined in a 'wonderful mixture'.⁷⁵ In his travel notes he similarly observed with pleasure a conversation that lasted into the night combining 'the call to prayer, pillows and socialism.'⁷⁶

These distinctions between Luria and Koffka's impressions are significant. Stalinist rhetoric in the years of the First Five Year Plan emphasised ethnic particularity rather than total homogeneity (Plates 2.1-2.4).⁷⁷ Stalin declared in 1929

⁶⁹ Harrower, p. 150.

⁷⁰ Harrower, p. 157.

⁷¹ Luria to Bruner, May 16 1964, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Archives (HUA), Jerome Bruner Papers, HUG 4242.5 General Correspondence 1964-65.

⁷² For example, on October 27 1967 Bruner wrote to Luria declaring: 'The camel has arrived!' (a gift Luria had sent from Central Asia). HUA Jerome Bruner Papers, HUG 4242.5 General Correspondence 1964-65.

⁷³ E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 57.

⁷⁴ Molly Harrower, 'A.R. Luria: A Personal Remembrance', AHAP, Molly Harrower Papers, Box 3212, folder 23.

⁷⁵ Alexander Luria to Horace Kallen, August 12 1932 (from Andijan, Uzbek SSR), AJA, Horace Kallen Papers, MS-1, Box 19, Folder 18.

⁷⁶ E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 61.

⁷⁷ See, Yuri Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review*, 53, 2 (1994), 414-452.

that fostering distinct national identities was central to the goals of the revolution: ‘on the ruins of the old, bourgeois nations new, socialist nations are arising and developing, and they are more solidly united than any bourgeois state.’⁷⁸ However, as Terry Martin discusses, the process of ‘indigenisation’ [*korenizatsiia*] in practice involved the promotion of certain aspects of national culture alongside an attack on many fundamental practices: ‘Promoting “national culture” meant aggressively promoting national identity, while undermining distinctive beliefs and social practices.’⁷⁹ The calculated promotion of national identity through folklore, national dress, cuisine, classic literary works and ‘progressive’ historic events resulted in a phenomenon Martin describes as ‘Stalinist primordialism.’⁸⁰ Unlike in Orientalism as defined by Said, this involved the valorisation of approved symbolic markers of national identity alongside a programme of radical social transformation, including a campaign against religion. Francine Hirsch similarly emphasises the differences between the left-wing folkloric impulses of Soviet reformers and their far-right German contemporaries. While German ethnographers focused on the primitive and eternal qualities of Germanic groups, in the Soviet Union traditional works were adapted to include distinctly socialist elements. Hirsch mentions an Armenian folk song about electric lighting, fairy tales about Lenin, Turkmen rugs embroidered with Stalin’s face and folk dances that dramatised collectivisation.⁸¹ The traditions of Central Asian nations may have been assumed to have no history of their own but they were not understood as being eternally immutable now that history had been introduced. Instead, tradition was framed as a dynamic aspect of a continually evolving historical society that would eventually be overcome. Luria’s contradictory depiction of Central Asia, which simultaneously celebrated tradition and progress, was in keeping with this state discourse. This difference in attitude between Luria and Koffka - with the former emphasising change and the latter permanence - was also reflected in their experimental approaches and conclusions.

⁷⁸ J. Stalin, ‘The National Question and Leninism (1929)’, *Works, vol. 11* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954), pp. 348- 372, p.356.

⁷⁹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 183.

⁸⁰ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 443.

⁸¹ Hirsch, pp. 270-271.

Gestalt, Universality and the Historical Nature of Human Consciousness

The fundamental difference between the Gestalt approach and Luria's was the latter's insistence on the primacy of social factors in determining thought processes. Luria attacked Gestalt psychology for making universalising claims about human thought processes on the basis of experiments conducted with people from a very limited demographic (primarily university educated and Western).⁸² He argued that the Gestalt approach to psychology risked suffocating the richness of particularity under a homogeneous conceptual blanket.

In a Preface to a Russian translation of Koffka, published shortly after the Central Asian expedition, Vygotsky clearly outlines his reservations with Koffka's work, claiming that in attempting to understand humans and apes using a single principle, Koffka neglects to probe what distinguishes human thought processes from those of animals. Vygotsky deems Gestalt theory too generalised, as it crucially 'ignores the historical nature of human consciousness'.⁸³ Koffka characterises development as natural and uniform, but, according to Vygotsky, human problems refuse to be straight-jacketed in this manner, offering 'fierce resistance to the naturalistic attempt to interpret them [they] attempt to tear the cover of this single undifferentiated Gestalt to pieces'.⁸⁴ The differences between the two psychological approaches persisted in the conclusions that emerged from the experiments in Central Asia. Both Luria and Koffka presented uneducated Uzbek people with various optical illusions intending to assess their perception of perspective. Luria concluded that respondents failed to respond to these tests, whereas Koffka asserted that responses were consistent with results obtained in the West; Luria emphasised cultural specificity and Koffka universality.⁸⁵ According to Koffka, the Uzbeks did have illusions; he attributed all exceptions to the 'suspicious' attitude of the

⁸² Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 31. Despite stating that his experimental approach was explicitly conceived in opposition to Gestalt psychology, Luria does not mention Koffka's participation in the expedition anywhere in *Cognitive Development*.

⁸³ Vygotsky, 'Preface to Koffka', *Collected Works of Lev Vygotsky, vol. 3*, ed. by Robert W. Rieber (New York and London, Plenum, 1997), pp. 195- 232, p. 216.

⁸⁴ Vygotsky, 'Preface to Koffka', p. 216.

⁸⁵ Compare Luria's conclusions in *Cognitive Development*, pp. 39-45 with Koffka's in Luria, 'The Second Expedition to Central Asia', p. 257.

participants, rather than to their cognitive abilities *per se*. For Koffka, thought structures do not differ in form between different cultures but only in content.

Luria's methodological approach ostensibly reflected his sensitivity to the cultural specificities of the people he was interviewing and differentiated his approach from Koffka's, who relied more heavily on standardised Western tests. His intention was to make the experimental situation as 'natural as possible' by establishing an informal, 'unaggressive' and 'friendly' atmosphere.⁸⁶ Interviews were designed so that they would not interrupt habitual activities and mostly conducted 'in the relaxed atmosphere of a tea house [...] or in the camps in the fields and mountain pastures around the evening camp fire'.⁸⁷ Luria describes how his team would begin by engaging people in a 'long, leisurely chat' before gradually introducing the questions that comprised the experimental protocol.⁸⁸ Conversations with women were conducted by female Uzbek psychologists in the home, where men were forbidden from entering. Luria was also alert to the limitations of using standardised tests developed in a Western context: 'Tests developed and validated in other cultures repeatedly produced experimental failures and invalidated our proposed study.'⁸⁹ The issue of standardised testing was very prominent in Soviet psychological debates. Aron Zalkind rejected testing in Central Asia in characteristically bellicose fashion, declaring:

[I]t is obvious that it is not that the children are imbeciles, but that the tests given to these children were imbecilic. Can we really ask questions devised on the basis of the socioeconomic and cultural experience of our own or Western capital cities? Can we really apply them to children of national minorities who live under completely unique conditions of the class struggle, of climate, culture, and everyday life?!⁹⁰

As such, the content of Luria's experiments were adapted to their Uzbek context.

Despite these efforts, however, Luria did concede that, 'no matter how natural we tried to make it and how much we prepared', the encounters were not

⁸⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 16.

⁸⁷ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 16

⁸⁸ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 46.

⁸⁹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 17.

⁹⁰ A. R. Zalkind, 'Psychoneurological Study of National Minorities', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 31, 1 (1993), 11-12 (from the stenographic record of a report presented at the Plenum of the First All-Union Congress for the Study of Human Behavior in 1930).

always amiable and communication was not always easy.⁹¹ All conversations were conducted in Uzbek through a translator and each psychologist was also accompanied by an assistant who sat away from the conversation in order to record people's responses as inconspicuously as possible. Not only was the conversation mediated, but Luria's commitment to creating a 'natural' atmosphere wilfully overlooks the historical situation of the encounter where any translation from Uzbek into Russian implied a power relation.⁹²

In his diary, Luria noted with bewilderment that he and his team were often met with hostility and resentment by the people they were attempting to investigate. Luria observed that the mountain shepherds were particularly confused and resistant to questioning and claimed that Kirghiz women angrily implored the psychologists not to bewitch their children.⁹³ Luria's experiments indicated that Uzbek people were reluctant to make suppositions about things beyond their immediate experience. One protocol involved presenting people with the following syllogism: 'In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Nova Zemlya is in the Far North and there is snow there. What colour are the bears there?' Respondents refused to infer anything from these words, stating bluntly: 'I don't know; I've seen a black bear' or 'We always speak of what we see; we don't talk about what we haven't seen.'⁹⁴ The hostility he encountered might be understood by pairing his own definition of Uzbek consciousness with a consideration of the historical situation within which the encounters took place: unlike white bears, white Russian intellectuals were not unfamiliar to Uzbek people. Perhaps, the hostile reactions of Uzbek people to the psychologists had a basis in the historical experience of Russian imperialism and communism, rather than being the result of psychic 'backwardness', as Luria implied. In his recent analysis of Soviet policies in Central Asia, Douglas Taylor Northrop describes party documents of the period based on similar assumptions to Luria's. Northrop contends that

⁹¹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 139.

⁹² Diana Fuss makes a similar argument about Frantz Fanon's psychiatric work in revolutionary Algeria. Fanon, who could speak neither Arabic nor Kabyle similarly relied on translators, which, Fuss argues 'could not avoid reproducing, within the space of the clinical treatment, the very structure of the colonial relation.' Diana Fuss, 'Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification, *Diacritics*, 24, 2/3 (1994), 19-42, p. 37.

⁹³ This anecdote was recorded in Luria's travel notes on the 1932 expedition cited in E. Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 61.

⁹⁴ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 109.

Uzbek Muslims were not primitive or ignorant, as party writers thought: decades of tsarist rule in Central Asia had shaped quite rational opinions about who Russians were and what they wanted, and ten years of Bolshevik rule had added further notions about Communists, who mostly were seen as alien atheists and city folk.⁹⁵

Uzbek people had their own assumptions and historically-formed prejudices about Russian people.

In *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (1935), a text that he began writing while convalescing from a fever in Central Asia,⁹⁶ Koffka imagines an encounter between a white person and a Chinese or Papuan person in native dress. Both people, he says, will experience the other as strange. Although the other person seems to belong to the category 'person', the definition of which has been established by previous experience, he or she also departs from that definition. Koffka claims that if such encounters happen regularly then the category 'person' might be expanded to include people with different characteristics. He notes, however, that this resolution is unlikely. Instead, he argues, it is more frequently the case that

the class schema remains unaffected and determines the characteristic of the individuals who, although they raise the claim to belong to it, deviate from it in certain striking aspects. The class schema, then, forms a sort of framework; what does not conform to the standard, appears as inferior. The stranger is the barbarian; he is inferior in every respect, simply because he is different from the type; he is less intelligent, less honest, less sensitive, and so forth.⁹⁷

For Koffka, thought structures originate in experience but once established are tenacious and resistant to change. He insists that the schemas of thought between different groups of people are opaque to one another; they are identical in structure if not in content. This, however, assumes that the encounters between different groups of people are not influenced by historically produced structural inequalities as, for example, in a colonial situation. Instead, he describes a situation of mutual and symmetrical incomprehension that cannot account for the domination of certain groups over others. Transposed into the Soviet context this observation does not

⁹⁵ Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 165.

⁹⁶ Molly Harrower, 'A.R. Luria: A Personal Remembrance', AHAP, Molly Harrower Papers, Box 3212, folder 23.

account for the asymmetrical power relations between Russian and non-Russian people.

Aesthetic judgment, Koffka continues, relies on a process of discrimination similar to that of the encounter between two foreigners; artworks are judged in relation to a pre-existing schema. He goes on to give an example from his experiences in Central Asia. In Samarkand, he reports, people are incapable of discerning the relative quality of an artwork. This inability to discriminate between works, he claims, is due to the Islamic ban on images: Uzbek people were not historically exposed to pictures and thus developed no means of discriminating between them. This was disrupted by the revolution: ‘with the old political order the religious order collapsed also, pictures were introduced and as a part of the new order were in themselves something good.’⁹⁸ Instead, he claims, for Uzbek people ‘every picture is desirable [...] one sees the streets lined with photographers who have the most atrocious backgrounds, canvases painted in the most vulgar manner and representing ugly objects, against which the patrons stand to have their photographs taken.’⁹⁹ The language Koffka employs here is heavily value-laden - ‘atrocious’, ‘vulgar’, ‘ugly’ - redolent of his disdain for Uzbek culture. He assumes a lack of exposure to certain aesthetic principles results in worse rather than different tastes. Within the space of two paragraphs Koffka identifies how cultural prejudice operates before going on to betray his own negative assumptions about Uzbek perception in precisely the terms he had just outlined: as ‘barbarian’, ‘inferior’, ‘less intelligent, less honest, less sensitive’ than his own. Koffka acknowledges that people with different experiences operate using different schema, but he does not entertain the possibility that competing ways of carving up reality are of equal validity; he undermines his professed interest in the universal. He thus simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the historical processes by which judgments come to seem self-evident.

In *Distinction*, his sociological analysis of the relationship between taste and class in post-war France, Pierre Bourdieu discusses how aesthetic judgment, the

⁹⁷ Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (New York; Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 349.

⁹⁸ Koffka, *Principles*, p. 350.

process of differentiating between objects, participates in a system that consolidates differences between subjects. According to Bourdieu, power structures are reproduced through systems of classification: ‘People’s image of classification is a function of their position within it.’¹⁰⁰ In Bourdieu’s account subjects both classify and are classified but the process of classification is forgotten. Bourdieu provides a compelling account of how people’s most mundane practices participate in maintaining existing social relations, positing taste as a crucial site of power: ‘classificatory systems are [...] the stake of struggle between the groups they characterise and counterpose.’¹⁰¹ His argument is premised on an assumption of human psychological parity that Luria’s research in Central Asia challenged. Bourdieu, like Koffka, assumes that classificatory systems rely on subjects who classify in the same manner but order things differently, whereas Luria set out to prove that the capacity to generalise was itself related to people’s social position.

Analysing how Uzbek people classified objects was one major strand of the psychological research conducted in Central Asia. Luria conducted experiments with geometric shapes. When presented with a series of shapes, he found that people with some formal education would use abstract categories (circle, triangle, square etc.), whereas illiterate people would name them according to objects encountered in their everyday lives (plate, beads, kettle stands etc.).¹⁰² This would then influence how the subjects would group things together. Presented with three different sized rectangles, for example, one respondent designated them: a star, a door and a canal.¹⁰³ When asked whether the three shapes had anything in common, they responded that they did not as stars, doors and canals have nothing to do with one another in the real world. Illiterate people would only concede to group objects together by concrete situation: having identified two shapes as a glass and a bowl, one person replied that they could be placed together as they could both be used in a kitchen (Plates 2.5 and 2.6).¹⁰⁴ A similar pattern was found in experiments with colours: illiterate people

⁹⁹ Koffka, *Principles*, pp. 349-350.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 473.

¹⁰¹ Bourdieu, p. 477.

¹⁰² Luria, *Cognitive Development*, pp. 34-39.

¹⁰³ Luria to Köhler, July 3 1931, APS, Wolfgang Köhler Papers, Series I. Correspondence, Mss.B.K815.

¹⁰⁴ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 37.

would liken colours to objects they encountered in their daily lives (pig's dung, sky, pistachio, decayed teeth, cotton in blossom etc) and resisted the experimenters' suggestion that these might be grouped by brightness or saturation: 'they shook their heads in perplexity and failed to complete the task'.¹⁰⁵ In another experiment, when asked to exclude one object from a group of four, illiterate people grouped objects by situation rather than category: 'Words [...] were used not to codify objects into conceptual schemes but to establish the practical interrelations among things.'¹⁰⁶ Of course, this still describes a mode of classification but for Luria this form of 'situational thinking' does not require that people make generalisations based on the 'essential feature of objects'.¹⁰⁷ Luria does not classify this mode of classification as classification as it is not 'advanced' (i.e. abstract) but understood as contingent on the vagaries of individual experience (i.e. not 'essential' but subjective). For Luria, literacy was the key factor which determined whether people organised objects conceptually rather than concretely; it was a prerequisite for 'advanced' forms of thought.

Language and Thought

Luria related some changes in thought to new collective forms of labour, claiming, for example, that collective farm workers were able to address 'pressing problems of social life', and arguing that the data gathered on the expedition 'adequately confirm that the mental life of these subjects changed radically because of collective social labour'.¹⁰⁸ Such statements, however, appear with relative infrequency in his conclusions. In practice, as Walter Ong observes, his conclusions mostly hinged on literacy, although he failed to 'systematically encode his findings expressly in terms of orality-literacy differences'.¹⁰⁹

Luria concluded that the more literate the person, the more abstract their thought processes. Indeed, as R.A. Houston's work demonstrates, Luria's

¹⁰⁵ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Luria, *Making of a Mind*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁷ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁸ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, pp. 141-2.

¹⁰⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York; Methuen, 1982), p. 50.

assumptions about literacy seem consistent with Western European understandings dating back to the Early Modern period:

Historically, literacy tends to be associated with the development of abstract thought, broadening of the mind through vicarious experience, the intensification and extensification of intellectual exchange, personal independence of thought and action, economic development [...] Illiterates, on the other hand, are allegedly more restricted in their thought patterns, intellectually impoverished, culturally backward, isolated, inert, almost pathological.¹¹⁰

Ong claims that Luria's conclusions are reached despite rather than because of Luria's 'elaborate Marxist scaffolding'.¹¹¹ Certainly, Luria would have disputed this, but his methodology contradicts his theoretical pronouncements here. Luria's experiments set out to prove the hypothesis that literacy allowed people to think beyond their immediate material circumstances, implying that becoming literate has an intrinsic emancipatory potential.¹¹² His analysis overlooks two major factors: what language people were becoming literate in and what qualified a person to be considered 'literate'.¹¹³ Despite his persistent declarations to the contrary, Luria treats language as precisely the kind of universal structure that he identifies and critiques as a key limitation of the Gestalt approach to psychology, ignoring the very cultural and social specificities that his work so frequently claims to be alert to. Although Luria conceives of literacy as something introduced historically, he treats language as an *a priori* structure which exists outside of time and space. But languages in the Soviet Union were volatile and, importantly, there were many different languages to choose between. Literacy was a highly-charged political issue.

The Soviet Campaign to Eradicate Illiteracy (*Likbez*) was profoundly ideological, pivotal to the consolidation of Soviet power and the attempt to create new Soviet people with specific national identities. The Extraordinary Commission

¹¹⁰ R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* (London; Longman, 1988), p. 2. See also, David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Cambridge; Polity, 2000).

¹¹¹ Ong, p. 50.

¹¹² Luria's assumptions about literacy have been challenged by subsequent researchers who were directly inspired by his research in Central Asia. See, James V. Wertsch, *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 39.

¹¹³ In his analysis of nineteenth century England, E.P. Thompson discusses varying degrees of literacy, something Luria fails to consider. Thompson also insists that illiteracy 'by no means excluded men from political discourse' and considers the multifarious ways in which illiterate people in nineteenth century England actively engaged in political debates. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London; Penguin, 1980), p. 782.

for the Liquidation of Illiteracy saw literacy as a key component in the building of socialism, a propagandistic mission was combined with a more practical belief that new forms of industry demanded literacy; that increased literacy would lead to greater productivity.¹¹⁴ In the vast, multilingual Soviet Union establishing a set of codified national languages was a major element in the project of creating distinct national groups, national in form, socialist in content.¹¹⁵ Many languages and dialects were spoken in imperial Turkestan. The Uzbek SSR came into being in 1924 as part of the National Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics. The Soviet authorities, drawing on research by teams of mostly Russian ethnographers, imposed Sart (an Uzbek dialect from Samarkand) as the national language, standardising and codifying spelling, vocabulary and grammar to create new national norms. At the time of the revolution, Uzbek was written in various Arabic scripts. In 1928 the Soviets replaced Arabic with the Latin alphabet, a policy related to the drive to eradicate Islam in the region.¹¹⁶ Uzbek spelling was codified in 1929.¹¹⁷ Luria's assertion that the ability to standardise, classify and taxonomise were essential to historical progression was consistent with these state policies, which were framed as progressive and proceeded through standardisation, classification and taxonomisation.

Literacy levels reportedly soared from 3.8% in 1926 to 52.5% in 1932.¹¹⁸ In

¹¹⁴ Although focussed on Russia a useful overview is provided in Charles E. Clark, *Uprooting Otherness: The Literacy Campaign in NEP-Era Russia* (Selinsgrove; Susquehanna University Press, 2000). See also, Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹¹⁵ See, J. V. Stalin, 'Marxism and the National Question (1913)', *Works, Vol. 2, 1907-1913* (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), pp. 300-381 and J.V. Stalin, 'The National Question and Leninism', *Works, vol. 11* (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), pp. 348-372. On the historical emergence of the link between nationality and language, see: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 101-120.

¹¹⁶ Luria himself mentions that 'removing the Muslim influence' was a major factor in the collectivisation campaign (*Cognitive Development*, p. vi). On anti-religious campaigns in the Soviet Union see Daniel Peris *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 1998). On the Soviet 'assault' on Islam see Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT; Praeger, 2001) and Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 2007).

¹¹⁷ On language policy in Soviet Central Asia, see Shirin Akiner, 'Uzbekistan: Republic of Many Tongues' in Michael Kirkwood, ed. *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke; Macmillan, 1989), pp. 100-121, Edward Allworth, *Uzbek Literary Politics* (The Hague; Mouton and Co., 1964) and Leonore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht; Kluwer Academic Publishing, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Akiner, p. 118.

practice, however, the linguistic situation in Uzbekistan remained heterogeneous and education chaotic. Most teachers were brought in from Russia and could not speak the local language. Russian therefore continued to function as the primary language of instruction at institutes of higher education. Even native teachers struggled to master the new language rules fast enough to teach them effectively.¹¹⁹ Luria does not discuss how or why people were educated in any detail. Indeed, although he states that experiments were conducted in Uzbek, it is unclear from reading his findings in which language his experimental subjects were being taught to become literate. Koffka's records of the 1932 expedition describe the extent to which language in Soviet Central Asia was far from a neutral, universal structure. His notes from a meeting with the Minister of Education from the People's Commission for the Enlightenment of the People convey some of the disorganisation of the educational system in this period, with instruction in a mixture of languages (predominantly Russian).¹²⁰ He also expressed doubt about the statistics that he was quoted on literacy levels, as he met so few literate people.¹²¹ Luria's discussion of literacy fails to account for the cognitive impact of this chaotic linguistic reality.

Furthermore, Koffka's private correspondence indicates that aside from Uzbek or Russian, Soviet citizens in Uzbekistan were expected to become fluent in the new language of Bolshevism.¹²² Many loan words entered Uzbek from Russian in the 1920s, which almost exclusively pertained to the new social structures and technologies introduced by the Soviet regime.¹²³ The content of reading materials available in state run reading rooms and schools were also ideologically focused, including editions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, newspapers and translations of approved authors. Instructional texts were produced with titles such as: 'What is a *Kolkhoz*?' 'What is a Soviet?' and 'The Party is Guiding Us.'¹²⁴ Koffka remarked upon the amazing 'uniformity of outlook' between the various educated people he

¹¹⁹ See, Michael G Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin and New York; Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 121–142.

¹²⁰ AHAP, Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M379, 'Lectures Misc'.

¹²¹ AHAP, Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M379, 'Lectures Misc'.

¹²² On learning to 'speak Bolshevik' see, Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (University of California Press, 1997), pp. 198-237.

¹²³ Akiner, p. 105.

¹²⁴ This example comes from the Katanga national region in the far north of Russia but is indicative of the kinds of materials being printed in non-Russian languages for non-literate and remote populations. Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, p. 224.

encountered on his trip, noting their shared lexicon, historical narrative and ideological outlook:

The uniformity of intellectual and emotional outlook is one of the strongest memories I carried away from my six weeks' visit to the Soviet Union [...] To have built this wall in a relatively short time is one of the greatest achievements of the Soviet government.¹²⁵

Koffka's wall metaphor recalls Adorno's description of the facade constructed by the *status quo* but Koffka was ambivalent about the relationship of consciousness to this structure. He was struck by the oppressive qualities of this tendency, but notes that these strangely homogeneous utterances were all the more surprising as they seemed to be made in earnest, not out of fear; 'honest yet uniform.'¹²⁶ Although Koffka was hesitant to conclude that all Soviet people thought and felt in the same way, he did note that the people he encountered were not selected on purpose to impress and convert him. On the night train to Tashkent, for example, he met a group of passengers from various Soviet Republics and backgrounds who spontaneously 'toasted each other and the world revolution.'¹²⁷ Here his scientific observations, which hinge on the universality of underlying thought structures, contrast with his personal narrative, which emphasises how different he feels from his Soviet counterparts (both Russian and Uzbek).¹²⁸ Koffka's informal observations indicate how language and thought processes in the Soviet Union were becoming socialist in content, providing a new schema for evaluating the world.

Luria's cross-cultural experiments were preceded by a series of experiments undertaken by a group of psychologists investigating children in remote Siberia. Unlike the results of the Central Asian experiments, which went unpublished for four decades, detailed reports of the Siberian findings appeared contemporaneously, in a special issue of the journal *Pedology* in 1929. These reports provide an insight into the pressing political concerns of the moment that are more muffled in Luria's later accounts, where he dispassionately presents socialism as a *fait accompli*.¹²⁹ The psychologists conducting research in Siberia were concerned with analysing how educational policies impacted on thinking. Many of their conclusions and

¹²⁵ Harrower, p. 159.

¹²⁶ Harrower, p. 159.

¹²⁷ Harrower, p. 159.

¹²⁸ Harrower, p. 148.

methodologies similarly hinged on literacy and new forms of social life, but they also indicate the political urgency of conveying the meaning of particular concepts and institutions. One psychologist notes approvingly that 89% of children from the Tungus tribe recognised Lenin's portrait and 'correctly' declared that he 'did everything'.¹³⁰ This acquaintance with the face of the former Soviet leader, they noted, was the work of the cooperative who acted like missionaries distributing his image: 'We found the portraits of leaders hanging in many yurts.'¹³¹ This, however, only served to underline the distinction between visual and verbal forms of understanding: 'Knowing what a clock looks like (95%) was no guarantee that the Tungus knew our units of time.'¹³² Similarly, recognising Lenin, it transpired, did not translate into an understanding of more abstract concepts like 'the Soviet Union' or 'Communism':¹³³

The children had a very vague notion of the USSR. Only a few even (20%) were familiar with the name, and of them only 5% (schoolchildren and students at the literacy centre) were able to say what 'USSR' meant [...] The Tungus children had no notion about the Revolution, the Communist Party, the Komsomol, the Pioneers, or the trade unions. Only 4% of schoolchildren knew what the Communists or the Pioneers or the Komsomol were. Most of the children had no notion of the Red Army. Only 7% (the schoolchildren) said that the Red Army was necessary.¹³⁴

Another experiment concluded similarly that most children were: 'still not fully aware that they had common interests with all the other workers in the Soviet Union.'¹³⁵ A psychologist who conducted experiments with adults was even more concerned: 'None of the adults could say what Moscow represented; they did not know, and could not explain, what Soviet power wanted, and they did not even know

¹²⁹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 164.

¹³⁰ I Bulanov, 'Findings from a Study of the Tungus Child', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 31, 1, (1993), p. 51. These articles originally appeared in *Pedologiya*, no. 2 (1930).

¹³¹ Bulanov, p. 52. Yuri Slezkine also describes ethnographers showing portraits of Lenin to tribes in the Russian far North. One adult was reported to respond: 'Who's this bald-headed merchant?', *Arctic Mirrors*, p. 241.

¹³² Bulanov, p. 49.

¹³³ Luria draws a similar conclusion from a test involving the face of Lenin undertaken with young children in 1955. A two year old child was taught to turn its head to a portrait of Lenin and point to it when asked 'Where is Lenin?' but when the portrait was removed the child would continue to point to the same spot, indicating that they had not grasped the meaning of the word 'Lenin' but only the instruction to point. Luria, *Language and Cognition*, trans. by James Wertsch (Washington DC; VH Winston and Sons, 1981), p. 47.

¹³⁴ Bulanov, p. 51-52.

¹³⁵ K.I. Usova, 'The Tungus Child in School', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 31, 1 (1993), 37-44, p. 43.

their regional centre, Verkhneudinsk'.¹³⁶ These people were not able to discuss places they had not personally visited, let alone define theoretical terms or newly introduced Soviet institutions.

Luria followed similar methods, asking people to define concepts like 'freedom'.¹³⁷ He reports that an illiterate 18 year old woman from a remote village responded by saying: 'I've heard that women have got their freedom, but that's all I know. It means that landowners repressed them before but now they've escaped from their misery.'¹³⁸ This response indicates some rote-learned familiarity with the official Soviet narrative but suggests that the word 'freedom' remained devoid of meaning, akin to the capacity to identify a clock without being able to tell the time.¹³⁹ Luria was more approving of the response of a *kolkhoz* worker who had completed a ten-week agricultural course. When asked 'what is a cooperative?' the man asserted that shops were once run by merchants who sold goods to peasants at high prices but are now run by the government in the people's best interests and concluded by noting that cooperatives make people part of a community. Luria asserted that this person demonstrated a complex and independent understanding of emerging social forms: 'Defines in far more detail concept introduced by social system; makes greater use of abstract categories; clarifies one concept by means of another.'¹⁴⁰ For Luria, education was not understood as a method for pouring a particular body of knowledge into a passive receptacle but created a new kind of subject capable of actively engaging with complex ideas. However, it is unclear whether Luria would have been equally as approving if the educated *kolkhoz* worker had responded by giving a detailed and eloquent critique of a cooperative. Luria

¹³⁶ A. Shepovalova, 'The Everyday Social Environment of Tungus Children in the Northern Baikal Region', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 31, 1 (1993), 19-36, p. 35.

¹³⁷ This protocol bears comparison to a study undertaken on the language of Red Army Soldiers in the mid-1920s, which asked similar questions and also concluded that recruits failed to assimilate the vocabulary of the Soviet regime (for example, 75% of respondents did not understand terms like 'blockade', 'import', 'monopoly' and 'bureaucrat'). See, Craig Brandist, 'Psychology, Linguistics and the Rise of Applied Social Science in the USSR: Isaak Shpil'rein's Language of the Red Army Soldier' in *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR, 1917-1938*, ed. by Brandist and Katya Chown (London; Anthem Press, 2010), pp. 151-167, p. 161.

¹³⁸ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 88.

¹³⁹ Luria notes that this woman, who, though illiterate, had attended some courses, was more advanced than those who had received no formal education. People with no formal education would define things tautologically ('A car is a car') whereas she made some attempt to define things by description and comparison ('[A car] is smaller than a room, uses fire and people sit in it [...] [like] cab drivers, bicycles, trains'), *Cognitive Development*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁰ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 89.

asserted that abstract thinking allowed people to think outside the parameters of their everyday experiences, but his research conclusions suggest that he was less concerned with encouraging people to question their immediate surroundings than with developing the capacity to comprehend particular structures.

Constructing the Communist Home

Stephen Kotkin observes that Stalinism was never merely 'a set of institutions, a group of personalities, or an ideology', but a whole culture:

a cluster of powerful symbols and attitudes, a language and new forms of speech, new ways of behaving in public and private, even new styles of dress [...] an ongoing experience through which it was possible to imagine and strive to bring about a new civilization called socialism.¹⁴¹

Kotkin's forensic inspection of Stalinism, *Magnetic Mountain*, treats the newly built 'Socialist City' Magnitogorsk as a microcosm of Soviet society, probing the encounter between quotidian activities and the grand ideological rhetoric of the revolution, occurring at the same moment that Luria and his team were attempting to trace the effects of rapid transformations occurring in Central Asia. Kotkin's approach is explicitly Foucauldian¹⁴² and tallies with Foucault's definition of 'order' as:

The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.¹⁴³

Foucault described his early publications on the incarceration and classification of the insane as histories of the excluded, of 'the Other – of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign'.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, *The Order of Things* was conceived of as 'the history of the Same', an attempt to analyse the strangeness and arbitrariness of the apparently inviolable ways the world is carved up, classified and understood. Luria's experiments in Central Asia were not only an attempt to trace

¹⁴¹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p. 14.

¹⁴² Kotkin claims to have undertaken his 'study of power on the micro-level' following discussions with Foucault in California in the early 1980s and the book is dedicated to Foucault's memory, *Magnetic Mountain*, p. xviii.

¹⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London, Routledge; 2002), p. xxvi.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. xxvi.

how 'the Other' was being transformed into 'the Same', but participated enthusiastically in the Stalinist project of eradicating difference through the imposition of certain normative abstract categories.

Crucially though, and this is perhaps what separates the Soviet project from other contemporaneous imperial powers, the 'order' being imposed was not a taken-for-granted, pre-existing, stable entity. The new Communist 'home' was still under construction. Certainly Luria betrayed many of the prejudices of the existing dominant culture, but that culture was itself volatile. Luria was also learning to master a particular vocabulary for interpreting and changing the world. Kotkin follows Foucault who set out to uncover culture's 'deepest strata', in the hope of restoring 'to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws',¹⁴⁵ but the cultural soil in the Soviet Union had not yet acquired this immobile appearance.

The unstable character of the Soviet present is captured in Luria's correspondence with the American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits. Herskovits wrote to Luria in 1932 to inquire about the Central Asian expeditions, in the hope that it would shed light on his own research into African American communities in the USA. Herskovits describes his work into 'New World Negroes' as addressing 'how people from one civilization take over aspects of another'.¹⁴⁶ As he states in his 1928 book *The American Negro*, the African American 'must solve the business of living in the culture that is not his own. How can he do it? He must learn to adjust himself to his cultural environment if he would survive.'¹⁴⁷ Herskovits characterises assimilation as a one-way process, in which the practices of one culture are simply replaced by those of the dominant culture without, however, eliminating social hierarchies based on racial prejudice.

The parallel Herskovits attempted to draw was not directly applicable to the Soviet context where no static established culture yet existed; the transformation in

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. xxvi

¹⁴⁶ Herskovits to Luria, March 2 1932, NUA, Melville J. Herskovits Papers, General, 1906-1942, Box 13, Folder 4, 1931-1935.

Central Asia was part of a transformation expected of all Soviet citizens, Luria and his team of researchers included. The question of adjusting to a cultural environment in order to survive was to become an almost universal concern in the context of Stalin's Soviet Union. Koffka noted he felt equally foreign among the Russian scientists as among the Uzbek peasants: 'they are different people. Different from me, I mean, that, even without the language difficulties, I do not feel quite at home with them.'¹⁴⁸ Of course, Luria still held that some were more equal than others, but unlike the hegemonic relation described by Herskovits, in which one oppressed culture disappears into the pre-existing culture of the oppressor, the question of the transformation required by Uzbek people was one of degree. Rather than referring to an already established order of things, the world Soviet citizens were being assimilated into was an abstract projection. The chaos, privations and flux of the present was anchored in the promise of a future yet to come.

Luria was quick to differentiate his work from Western studies which described the narrower world-view of 'primitive' communities as an inherent deficiency of certain racial groups.¹⁴⁹ Despite drawing on their research, Luria differentiated his approach from Western anthropologists on the basis that their accounts of 'primitive' societies lacked any 'causal analysis':¹⁵⁰ they presented backwardness as an inherent and immutable aspect of the culture being studied rather than as something historically determined and therefore eradicable. However, although Luria's research intentions were consistent with the broad campaign against biological determinism launched during the First Five Year Plan,¹⁵¹ as he did not publish his findings immediately, the bitterly ironic outcome was that accusations of racism formed a major part of his denunciation. In 1935 he wrote to Herskovits to ask for advice on 'studies concerning the problem of racial differences in intelligence, and all what is [*sic*] published and sed [*sic*] by important men contra the

¹⁴⁷ Melville J. Herskovits, *The American Negro: A Study in Racial Crossing* (New York, NY; Alfred A Knopf, 1928), p. 53.

¹⁴⁸ Harrower, p. 148.

¹⁴⁹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. vi.

¹⁵⁰ Luria to Kallen, October 29 1931, AJA, Horace Kallen Papers, MS-1, Box 19, Folder 18.

¹⁵¹ In the early 1930s, at the same time that Luria was conducting his experiments, Soviet ethnographers and anthropologists were sent to Central Asia with a mandate to disprove the theories of fascist 'race science' that was gaining increasing prominence in Germany. See, Hirsch, pp. 246-272.

fascistic ideas on racial inequality. We should be glad to show that such ideas are mere [*sic*] political and have no important scientific background.’¹⁵² Written in uncharacteristically messy handwriting and poor English, this letter hints at the pressure Luria was under to demonstrate the invalidity of racial determinism. As part of his defensive response to criticisms, Luria explicitly differentiated his work from Nazism in a 1933 article attacking German fascist science. There he asserted that his psychological experiments proved the assumptions of German scientists wrong, but concluded by noting that investigations conducted by experts were unnecessary to demonstrate that thought processes are not biological: the revolution was proof enough. Liberating people from capitalism and ‘colonial tsarist oppression’ had a demonstrative impact on thought, testifying to the possibility for all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity, to participate in the revolution.¹⁵³

Langston Hughes, who travelled in Soviet Central Asia in 1933, did see a parallel between Central Asian people and African Americans, but unlike Herskovits he explicitly differentiated the USA from the Soviet Union. After visiting a film school where illiterate nomads were being taught to operate film cameras Hughes reflected on how ‘impregnable Hollywood had been to Negroes,’ noting that black people were not even encouraged to operate cinema projectors, whereas in the Soviet Union he witnessed ‘coloured people being taught by white men’, a pedagogical process he perceived as empowering rather than paternalistic. He distinguishes this understanding of the process occurring in Central Asia from that of his companion Arthur Koestler (who went on to write one of the most influential accounts of the totalitarian subject *Darkness at Noon*): ‘To Koestler, Turkmenistan was simply a primitive land moving into twentieth-century civilization. To me it was a coloured land moving into orbits hitherto reserved for whites.’¹⁵⁴

Luria presented education in Soviet Central Asia as a similarly benevolent endeavour. However, Luria and Vygotsky explicitly asserted that the civilized and

¹⁵² See, Luria to Herskovits, 17th November 1935, Northwestern University Archives, Melville Herskovits Papers, General, 1906-1942, Box 13, Folder 4, 1931-1935.

¹⁵³ Luria, ‘Psikhologiya ras i fashistskaia nauka’ [‘Psychology of Race and Fascist Science’], *Front Nauka Tekhniki*, 12, 1933, 97-108, p. 108.

¹⁵⁴ Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (New York, NY; Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1986), p. 116.

educated adult was ‘much more powerful’ than the ‘primitive’ person.¹⁵⁵ The rationale for this argument was the belief that abstract thinking allowed humans to exert more of an impact on their external environment. Like Hughes’s descriptions of Central Asia, they do not foreground the power human beings exerted over one another in that context. That Luria’s research in Central Asia was denounced for its insufficient political commitment demonstrates that mastering shared categories in order to operate within the terms of the dominant narratives was not a guaranteed defence against the concrete power of the state. After all, the Stalinist Terror that was eventually to unfold was remarkable for murdering the very people who had led the revolution. Luria explicitly conceived of his work in relation to Stalinist frameworks and was also denounced in those terms, but his experiments describe encounters with people who did not recognise those structures.

In her analysis of Hughes’s engagements with Soviet Central Asia, Kate A. Baldwin focuses on his preoccupation with unveiling Muslim Uzbek women, which he employed as a metaphor for understanding his own African-American male subject position, building on W.E.B. Du Bois’s description of racial inequality as a ‘veil’ in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).¹⁵⁶ Hughes, like Luria, was an outsider in Central Asia who did not speak the local languages. As such, his treatment of unveiling was primarily symbolic; he sought to identify with Muslim Uzbek women rather than to discern his distance and difference from them. The veiled Muslim woman was also a central figure in Luria’s research. Both Luria and Hughes understood unveiling Uzbek women in relation to their own conceptions of an ideal ‘emancipated’ subject. However, Luria’s research, unlike Hughes’s accounts, contains transcriptions of interviews with Uzbek women themselves, whose voices threaten the ideal model he attempted to impose on them.

Unveiling Primitive Psychology

In 1925, Vygotsky and Luria wrote the introduction to the Russian translation of

¹⁵⁵ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’ in Vygotsky and Luria in *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Know (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), pp. 140-231, p. 169.

¹⁵⁶ Baldwin, pp. 86-148.

Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. They praised the text for its boldness, but were unable to accept the conservatism of the instincts insisted upon by Freud. They likened Freud's discovery of 'a country beyond the pleasure principle', to Columbus's discovery of America; Freud may have found this place but, they claimed, he has yet 'to produce an exact geographical map of the new continent or colonise it.'¹⁵⁷ This imperial metaphor likens their approach to the colonial invader seeking to subdue, 'modernise' and domesticate the unconscious, to rid it of primitivism and impose a new system of command. Unlike Freud who insisted on the persistence of the primitive in the timeless unconscious, and thus as an inexorable part of civilization, Vygotsky and Luria conceived of primitivism as something fundamentally eradicable, a temporal stage to be overcome and left behind. This attitude also applied to supposedly primitive people.¹⁵⁸

In his introduction to *Cognitive Development* Luria declared bombastically: 'When the socialist revolution eliminated dominance and submission as class relations, people oppressed one day enjoyed a free existence the next. And for the first time they enjoyed responsibility for their own future.'¹⁵⁹ In practice, however, his research conclusions do not bear this out. Not only was the pace of change slower than this statement suggests but the parameters for understanding dominance and submission in Luria's studies were not exclusively framed in terms of class struggle.

The study's focus on women was, however, consistent with Soviet policies in the region. In Central Asia, Soviet authorities targeted women as what Gregory Massell has called a 'surrogate proletariat', identifying Muslim women as an exceptionally oppressed group. Douglas Taylor Northrop even goes so far as to

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky, 'Introduction to the Russian translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*' in René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner eds. *The Vygotsky Reader* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 10-18, p. 15.

¹⁵⁸ Freud's interest in existing 'primitive' societies, though it relied on similar anthropological sources and betrayed similar prejudices, was not interventionist in the manner of his Soviet contemporaries. There is a vast literature on Freud and primitivism and colonialism, as well as the use of psychoanalytic

concepts in post-colonial thought. See, for example, Celia Brickman, *Aboriginal Populations in the Mind: Race and Primitivity in Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY; Colombia Press, 2003) and Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London; Verso, 2003).

¹⁵⁹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 13.

claim that in Uzbekistan ‘women’s emancipation ultimately came in many ways to exemplify the entire Bolshevik Revolution.’¹⁶⁰ In order to go about emancipating this group of revolutionary allies, an image of female inferiority within Muslim society was constructed by mostly Western revolutionary elites.¹⁶¹ In 1927 a ‘*hujum*’ (assault or attack) was launched intended to liberate women from the oppressive traditions identified by Bolshevik ideologues, including family and kinship relations, property laws, religious practices, domestic roles and divisions of labour. Koffka’s notes from his introductory meeting with Uzbek Communist Party officials clearly foreground the issue of gender: ‘Position of women: truly oppressed. Excluded from all culture [...] Now principle of equality, social and political.’¹⁶² Luria writes that ‘[t]he Islamic religion helped to maintain women’s lack of rights,’ singling out their seclusion within the home and their veil-wearing as evidence of oppression.¹⁶³ Muslim women were positioned between the modern communist future and the traditional religious past with the veil (*paranja*) acting as the preeminent symbolic site in this ideological tussle (Plate 2.7). This was a contradictory position: uneducated Muslim women were simultaneously seen as the most socially repressed (and therefore the most revolutionary) but concomitantly the most psychically backward (and therefore the least revolutionary). Enter: the revolutionary vanguard. As I go on to discuss in detail in Chapter 3, this Leninist political strategy is predicated on an inequality between the oppressed and the emancipator, in which the latter threatens to replicate the position of the oppressor it seeks to overthrow.

In ‘Algeria Unveiled’ (1957), Frantz Fanon traces the ever-shifting status of veiling as a political strategy in colonial Algeria and during the struggle for independence.¹⁶⁴ In the early 1930s, French colonial administrators in Algeria focused on the veil as a symbol of oppression in an analogous manner to their Soviet

¹⁶⁰ Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, p. 9. For a vivid first-hand account of the social upheavals following the onset of the First Five Year Plan sympathetic to the Soviet cause see, Anna Louise Strong, *Red Star Over Samarkand* (London; Coward-McCann, 1930).

¹⁶¹ Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 93-127.

¹⁶² AHAP, Kurt Koffka Papers, Box M379, ‘Lectures Misc’.

¹⁶³ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 14

¹⁶⁴ Fanon visited the Soviet Union in 1961 for medical treatment and his books were translated into Russian. There is, however, no evidence that Luria engaged with his work. Indeed, no mention of anti-colonial struggle is made in *Cognitive Development*, an interesting omission considering the prominence given to such events in the Soviet press during the period he was writing up his research.

contemporaries. Fanon discusses how both veiling and unveiling went on to be adopted as political gestures of resistance at various moments in the revolution: Muslim women unveiled in order to disguise themselves as ‘allies’ of the Europeans but at a later point in the conflict veils were reassumed in order to conceal weaponry. Fanon’s discussion of the vagaries of veiling is alert to the subtle shifts of history which Luria so often failed to apprehend. For Fanon, veiling in itself is neither inherently oppressive nor liberatory; what is paramount is the rejection of the coloniser: ‘The phenomenon of resistance in the colonised must be related to an attitude of counter assimilation, of maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality.’¹⁶⁵ All values imposed by the coloniser must be rejected ‘*even if these values objectively be worth choosing.*’¹⁶⁶ As Adrienne Edgar argues, the Soviet Union’s policies in Central Asia had more in common than with the modernising regimes of Ataturk’s Turkey and Reza Shah’s Iran than with, for example, those implemented in British India. Unlike in neighbouring Muslim countries, however, Soviet power in Uzbekistan was perceived as an alien, external force. Hence, according to Edgar, resistance to the policies was far more severe. This suggests, in line with Fanon’s analysis, that the rejection of certain policies intended to liberate Uzbek women was done so not on the basis of their content but at least in part because they were imposed by a foreign governing body.¹⁶⁷ Though heralding the elimination of dominance and submission, the Soviet project, spearheaded by Westerners like Luria, could not avoid re-inscribing them.

In the face of a widespread violent backlash against unveiled women by Muslim men, the period during which Luria conducted his research saw a retreat from some of the more radical policies of the ‘*hujum*’.¹⁶⁸ Unveiling may have symbolically ushered an Uzbek women into an abstract liberated collective but in practice an isolated unveiled woman in an Uzbek village risked concrete violence.

¹⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, ‘Algeria Unveiled’ in *The New Left Reader*, ed. by Carl Oglesby (New York, NY; Grove Press, 1969), pp. 161-185, p. 167.

¹⁶⁶ Fanon, p. 184 (my emphasis). Taylor Northrop’s analysis agrees with Fanon’s in that he argues that veil became a major issue for Uzbek people as a result of its targeting as a symbol of oppression by the Bolsheviks.

¹⁶⁷ Adrienne Edgar, ‘Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet “Emancipation” of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective’, *Slavic Review* 65, 2 (2006), 252-272.

¹⁶⁸ Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA; Hoover Institute Press, 1990), pp. 223-224.

Thousands of women were murdered by local men, a wide-spread phenomenon that the Soviet administration did little to halt.¹⁶⁹ Just as Luria's criticisms of psychoanalysis overlooked the antagonisms and violence of NEP-era Moscow (discussed in Chapter 1), so the rhetorical promise of liberation crashed up against the violent realities of Soviet Uzbekistan.

Throughout Luria's reports, illiterate '*ichkari*' women are shown to score the lowest on psychological tests as their 'immediate physical experience abounds'.¹⁷⁰ Luria characterises them as having a passive attitude. Yet it is these women who are described as the most intractable and resistant to the psychologists' suggestions. Transcriptions of interviews reveal that the encounters were far from passive but sites of contestation, in which the women being interviewed obstinately refused to adopt the thought processes of their interlocutors. When asked to place two skeins of wool in different shades of orange together, for example, '*ichkari*' women were reported to reject the suggestion the skeins had anything in common: "It can't be done", "None of them are the same, you can't put them together", "They're not at all alike" or "This is like calf's dung, and this is like a peach."¹⁷¹ Asked to respond to the syllogism concerning the existence of white bears in the Far North (cited above), the women interviewed 'refused to accept the major premise', 'replaced the inferential process by considerations of their own' or 'introduced general, rumour-based opinions about bears':

"You would have to ask people who had been there and seen them" [...] "There are different kinds of bears; if one was born red, he will stay that way" [...] "The world is large, I don't know what kinds of bears there are." [...] "Once I saw a bear in a museum, but that's all"¹⁷²

Luria notes in a tone of exasperation that 'in each case they would avoid solving the task'.¹⁷³ In another exercise subjects were asked to perform a basic mathematical problem: 'It takes thirty minutes to walk to village X, and it is five times faster on a bicycle. How long will it take on a bicycle?' Illi-Khodzk, a 24 year old illiterate woman responded: "My brother in Dzhizak has a bicycle, and he goes much faster

¹⁶⁹ See, Shoshana Keller, 'Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941', *Journal of Women's History*, 10, 1 (1998), 20-44.

¹⁷⁰ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 30.

¹⁷¹ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 27.

¹⁷² Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 107, p. 111.

¹⁷³ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 107.

than a horse.” Nurmat, a 36 year old illiterate woman replied: ““I know that bicycles go faster than bullock carts.””¹⁷⁴ Luria expresses frustration that the women related the question to their own experiences and that they refused to respond when the problem was repeated. Again and again Luria observes that despite prompting from the psychologists ‘the subjects persisted in their own approach,’¹⁷⁵ ‘they refused decisively to draw inferences’¹⁷⁶ and that ‘every attempt to suggest the possibility of categorical grouping met with protest.’¹⁷⁷

Luria did not directly encounter these women, who were interviewed by his female colleagues in their homes. He only glimpsed ‘*ichkari*’ women from afar, beneath their veils. Luria’s account of the experiments, which agrees with Hughes’s characterisations of the veil, implies that these women’s constrained thought processes were a counterpart to their restricted social position, but the frustration that pervades his account of their responses to the experiments stems from their inaccessibility and apparent imperviousness to change. Fanon describes the Western male frustration with the veiled Muslim woman as metonym for the colonial desire to conquer, understood in sexual terms (an eroticism which, as we have already seen, was evident in Koffka’s writings on Uzbekistan). The veil implies an unknowability and distance that cannot be tolerated. The veiled woman sees without being seen and thus represents a threat to the colonising mission: ‘There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.’¹⁷⁸ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon also discusses the significance of non-cooperation within colonial regimes, identifying quotidian refusals to comply with the dominant order as acts of sabotage: ‘The native’s laziness is the conscious sabotage of the colonial machine; on the biological plane it is a remarkable system of auto-protection; and in any case it is a sure brake upon the seizure of the whole

¹⁷⁴ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 121.

¹⁷⁵ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 60

¹⁷⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁷ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁸ Fanon, ‘Algeria Unveiled’ p. 169. Anne McLintock suggests that Fanon’s discussion of the veiling and unveiling female subject fails to break with the assumption that ‘privileged national agents are urban, male, vanguardist and violent.’ In Fanon’s model women are made militant by men. In this sense, Fanon retains the inequitable elements of a Leninist understanding of revolutionary consciousness that is not so remote from Luria’s after all. See, Anne McLintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London; Routledge, 1995), pp. 360-368, p. 364. For a recent analysis of the political significance of the veil (in the Egyptian context) written from a

country by the occupying power.¹⁷⁹ Fanon views such mundane acts of non-compliance as evidence of a kind of proto-revolutionary subjectivity, the prelude to more militant, organised forms of struggle. On this issue, Fanon's analysis adheres to a Leninist model which sees revolutionary consciousness developing from spontaneous acts of resistance.

For Luria, however, '*ichkari*' women were the antithesis of the ideal revolutionary subjectivity he hoped the social transformations accompanying collectivisation would bring into being. In his discussions of these women's responses, Luria proclaims protest and resistance antithetical to revolutionary consciousness. Luria may have wanted to create active subjects capable of enthusiastically building a collective future, but that future was to be structured in a particular way and thus involved the imposition of a particular psychic framework. As such, the sparks of resistance in the encounters were not interpreted as flashes of spontaneity but as evidence of mental stultification blocking the path to consciousness.

This contradiction is similar to the 'strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms', which Fred Moten identifies in Fanon's work.¹⁸⁰ Moten sees a fundamental ambivalence within Fanon's project, describing a struggle between the normative impulse of the psychologist and the militant's desire to destroy all norms. Moten suggests that Fanon fails to properly confront the contradictory position of the militant pathologist, evading the question of how it might be possible to reconcile rehabilitation or reintegration with a politics that intends to radically transform the world, asking: 'who would heal by way of explosion, excision, or exorcism?'¹⁸¹ Moten situates Fanon's work in a Western culture of expert knowledge animated by a 'teleological principle' akin to the

feminist perspective based on interviews with women, see Fadwa El Guindi, 'Veiling Resistance', *Fashion Theory*, 3, 1, 51–80.

¹⁷⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 237–238. This argument is strikingly similar to Kotkin's discussions of the mundane interactions of people with the state that shaped the experience of Stalinism. He describes 'eager participation in, frequent circumvention of, and resourceful, albeit localised, resistance to the terms of daily life that developed within the crusade of building socialism,' *Magnetic Mountain*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁰ Fred Moten, 'The Case of Blackness', *Criticism*, 50, 2, (2008), 177–218, p. 178.

¹⁸¹ Moten, p. 210.

progressive model of human development adopted by Luria.¹⁸² The question of the relationship between order and chaos, framed as a relationship between a social ideal and a subject perceived as psychically deficient, continues to animate the following chapters of this thesis which consider Luria's writings on children and brain-injured people. Although Luria's work in Central Asia was not concerned with pathological cases *per se*, insofar as Uzbek people were portrayed as primitive, backward and mentally disorganised in contrast to those at the revolution's vanguard, he does impute to uneducated Uzbeks what Moten describes as an 'ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence,'¹⁸³ defined in implicit opposition to the 'order' of the Soviet civilising mission.

Moten, in an argument that runs counter to an orthodox Marxist-Leninist valorisation of organisation, suggests that disorderliness that might prove revolutionary. For Moten, the experience of the colonised is defined by 'irremediable homelessness';¹⁸⁴ outside the coordinates of dominant structures that seek to contain it, the colonised subject threatens to unravel those structures through the refusal to be contained: 'the object vibrates against its frame like a resonator, and troubled air gets out. The air of the thing that escapes enframing is what I'm interested in—an often unattended movement that accompanies largely unthought positions and appositions.'¹⁸⁵ This troubled air wafts through the transcripts of Luria's experimental protocols. The subjects his works describe vibrate against their frames; the misrecognitions and disagreements documented by Luria's research gesture towards the existence of the world beyond his frames. Indeed, the resistance Luria describes resides precisely in the '*ichkari*' women's refusal to adopt a form of thought that privileges framing (which relies on generalisation and abstraction) over scattered particularity. Luria claimed that the transition to socialism would be accompanied by a 'revolution' in thought that would eradicate rather than install 'constricted' forms of thought, allowing people to break out from the confines of their everyday life. In the context of these experiments, however, clinging to the

¹⁸² Moten, p. 177.

¹⁸³ Moten, p. 187.

¹⁸⁴ Moten, p. 187.

¹⁸⁵ Moten, p. 182.

immediate seems less constrictive than adopting the normative standards of the emergent dominant culture.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

Should one postulate a type for human reality and describe its psychic modalities only through deviations from it, or should one not rather strive unremittingly for a concrete and ever new understanding of man?¹⁸⁷

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

In 'Primitive Man and His Behaviour' (1930), Luria and Vygotsky argue that the use of magic in primitive societies demonstrates humanity's desire to control nature and itself, and thus represents a significant progressive step towards civilization. The authors point to magic's rational kernel, arguing that casting spells to create rain or love are embryonic forms of civilization: 'we see in magic in its undeveloped form both the future technique for controlling nature and the cultural techniques for the control of man's own behaviour.'¹⁸⁸ The husk of irrationality is discarded when humanity develops more advanced techniques for mastering its environment. Luria and Vygotsky's argument, formulated immediately prior to the expeditions to Central Asia, is the inverse of that put forth by Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which enlightened rationality emerges through the repression or disavowal of irrationality, rather than through its extirpation. Adorno and Horkheimer's argument agrees with Vygotsky and Luria's insofar as they conceive of domination over nature as a central tenet of magic. However, Luria and Vygotsky's argument conforms with Adorno and Horkheimer's definition of Enlightenment thinking as they champion disenchantment and scientific progress.

¹⁸⁶ We have no way of knowing what became of the women Luria's collaborators interviewed, but an oral history project conducted with Uzbek women of the same generation in the 1990s found that those interviewed (most of whom ultimately became literate and unveiled) tended to present their lives as 'narrative[s] of progress' and identified many positive aspects of the Soviet experience. See, Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle, WA; University of Washington Press, 2006), p. 228.

¹⁸⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London; Pluto, 1988), p. 12.

¹⁸⁸ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Primitive Man and His Behaviour' in *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Know (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), pp. 79-139, p. 134.

Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer explicitly argue that state socialism, by clinging to the heritage of bourgeois philosophy, failed to escape the dialectic of Enlightenment.¹⁸⁹ For Adorno and Horkheimer, although magic itself already entails enlightened thinking, it retains a sensitivity to specificity which modern science lacks. The 'corrosive rationality'¹⁹⁰ of Enlightenment insists on obliterating the differences between things: 'All gods and qualities must be destroyed'.¹⁹¹ This 'amputation of the incommensurable',¹⁹² which reduces nature to exchangeable standardised chunks, is achieved through abstraction: 'Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities.'¹⁹³ For Adorno and Horkheimer, humans in advanced industrial societies, like terrified rabbits dissected in laboratories, are reduced to isolated but identical samples of their species. Concatenated nature is split into discrete specimens of matter. Individual suffering is elided and the thing-like bourgeois subject emerges.

But the irrational cannot be exorcised. Indeed, proclaiming its disappearance paradoxically functions to increase its strength. Just as for Freud, who insisted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that progress is paradoxically occasioned by the desire to return to a previous state, Adorno and Horkheimer insist that 'the curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression.'¹⁹⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer claim that an increased power over nature is coupled with the increased subjugation of humanity. By eviscerating the particular, Enlightenment left the 'uncomprehended whole'¹⁹⁵ (nature) free to rebound on the human subjects who had attempted to master it. This violence, they claim, has its origins in abstraction which, it transpires, is painfully concrete.

The main goal of Luria's research was to identify and trace the emergence of

¹⁸⁹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Norr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 32.

¹⁹⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 4.

¹⁹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 5.

¹⁹² Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 9.

¹⁹³ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 28.

¹⁹⁵ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 33.

the capacity for abstract thought, defined as the capacity to generalise, categorise and classify objects according to pre-existing socially-established criteria. He viewed this as crucial to the progress of civilisation. Following Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, Luria's faith in the emancipatory potentials of abstract thinking overlooks the structure of domination inherent within it. However, a contradiction existed between Luria's discussions of abstraction as a cognitive capacity, on the one hand, and as a research methodology, on the other. For Luria not only advocated abstraction as a mode of thought but simultaneously insisted that a properly Marxist approach to psychology should treat cognition as time-bound and historical. His scientific approach claimed to *retain* a sensitivity to the specificities of his objects of analysis that seems alert to the rationalising tendencies of scientific abstraction condemned by Adorno and Horkheimer. Luria described illiterate people as being insufficiently advanced due to the 'unmediated' nature of their thought processes, yet immediacy was paradoxically what he strove for when he constructed his experiments;¹⁹⁶ Luria extolled the capacity for abstraction whilst eschewing it as a research methodology.

In 1967 Luria informed Jerome Bruner that he planned to write up the results of his experiments in Central Asia conducted in the 1930s. He said that he conceived of the work as part of a 'romantic series' that would also include his two case histories: *The Mind of a Mnemonist* and *The Man with a Shattered World* (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and the Coda).¹⁹⁷ Luria contrasted the 'romantic' approach taken in these late publications to the 'classical' approach typical of most scientific writing. For Luria, the romantic scientist hopes to convey the qualitative specificity of human experience by abjuring abstraction:

Romantics in science want neither to split living reality into its elementary components nor to represent the wealth of life's concrete events in abstract models that lose the properties of the phenomena themselves. It is of the utmost importance to romantics to preserve the wealth of living reality, and they aspire to a science that retains this richness.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Luria, *Cognitive Development*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁷ Luria to Bruner January 9 1967, HUA, Jerome Bruner Papers, HUG 4242.5 General Correspondence 1964-65.

¹⁹⁸ Luria, *Making of a Mind*, p. 174.

Luria was not concerned with describing symptoms or responses in isolation from a person's whole personality, but hoped that his approach would allow for the preservation of 'the manifold richness of the subject'.¹⁹⁹

In his description of 'classical' science, Luria defines abstraction as a withdrawal from reality, which drains qualities from the concrete.²⁰⁰ In these discussions he draws close to Adorno and Horkheimer's arguments. His distinction between 'classical' and 'romantic' science might be aligned with the distinction between traditional and critical theory Horkheimer outlined in 1930 (discussed in my Introduction). As Adorno bleakly intones in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'the concrete continues to exist only as a mask of the abstract and the determinate particular is nothing more than an exemplar of the universal [...] The marrow of experience has been sucked out.'²⁰¹ In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno advocates a mode of engagement with the world that resists abstraction by attending to objects in their specificity, which seems to chime with Luria's definition of romantic science: 'To yield to the object means to do justice to the object's qualitative moments.'²⁰²

In the context of the Central Asian expeditions, as this chapter has argued, Luria's declared sensitivity to cultural particularity was complicated by his continued imposition of pre-existing normative frameworks onto the Uzbek people he encountered. 'Classical' scientific abstraction returned through the back door. Ultimately, however, as the example of his descriptions of discussions with 'ichkari' women demonstrates, Luria's publications based on his research in Central Asia did not succeed in presenting the people he described as identical with his frameworks. Luria's publications attest to continued tensions between the concrete and the abstract.

The two-fold character of Luria's understanding of abstraction, which was simultaneously 'classical' and 'romantic', replicates the two-fold character of the

¹⁹⁹ Luria, *Making of a Mind*, p. 178.

²⁰⁰ For critical overviews of discussions of abstraction in philosophy, see: Jay Bernstein, 'The Death of Sensuous Particulars', *Radical Philosophy*, 76 (1996), 7-18 and Peter Osborne, 'The Reproach of Abstraction', *Radical Philosophy*, 127 (2004), 21-28.

²⁰¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN; University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 31.

dialectic of Enlightenment in which domination and emancipation are constantly intertwined. A dialectical understanding of the relation between abstract and concrete is acknowledged by Luria when, in his discussion of scientific methodologies, he invokes Marx's 'strange-sounding expression "ascending to the concrete"'.²⁰³ Similarly, the properly dialectical structure of Adorno and Horkheimer's argument ensures that qualities are never successfully liquidated by abstraction, but remain as a substratum of all quantities.²⁰⁴ After all, they did not advocate returning to some lost past devoid of abstraction (indeed, they are clear that such a past never existed as 'myth is already Enlightenment').²⁰⁵ Splintered shards of hope coruscate within their bleak prose. They insist that 'every form of coercive power' tends towards a 'negative utopia.'²⁰⁶ Luria's work could be read as containing a similar impulse to dialectically overcome its own domineering aspect.

Luria did not outline his 'romantic' approach to science until the end of his career, suggesting that only then were the political constraints loose enough to allow him to attend closely to the textures of reality such an approach necessitated. The closing chapter of this thesis argues that it was only in his case histories (published and written in the same period as *Cognitive Development* but based on material gathered after the Second World War) that Luria succeeded in prioritising analysis of his subjects over his frames for understanding them. As such, Luria's attempt to develop a scientific method attentive to history might itself challenge Adorno and Horkheimer's sweeping characterisation of science as necessarily on the side of manipulation and unification, in favour of a dialectical approach to objects (or, rather, to subjects) that did not reduce them to mere quantities.²⁰⁷

²⁰² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans by E. B. Ashton (New York, NY; Seabird Press, 1973), p. 43.

²⁰³ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 178. This question is explored in detail in the work of the Soviet philosopher E. Ilyenkov (who worked in psychology in Moscow in the post-war period). A detailed discussion of the convergences between Luria and Ilyenkov's work is beyond the scope of this thesis. See, E.V. Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Marx's Capital*, trans. by Sergei Syrovatkin (Delhi; Aarkar, 2008).

²⁰⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 43.

²⁰⁵ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. xviii.

²⁰⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 54.

²⁰⁷ In *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (a book which emerged from a PhD supervised by Adorno and Horkheimer), Alfred Schmidt claims that science as such 'is undialectical in that it does not reflect the historical mediation of its objects'. I have come to reject this particular line of 'Western Marxist' thought as overly pessimistic - I would even venture to say undialectical - for its refusal to consider the possibility of an approach to nature that might be attentive to history. See, Alfred Schmidt, *On The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London; New Left Books, 1971) p. 55. Such a science (akin to that

This chapter began by asking whether Luria's research merely reflected his Stalinist environment or whether it might have smashed through the mirror. A close analysis of materials pertaining to Luria's expeditions to Central Asia suggests that although Luria described abstract thinking as the capacity to intervene in extant reality, in practice he was more concerned with creating subjects who reflected the structures emerging around them. However, he encountered people who failed to appear in the looking glass at all. Perhaps if he was less concerned with discerning the outlines of an ideal figure from whom those people departed, he might have come closer to a qualitative representation of them. This approach is gestured towards in *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (discussed in detail in the Coda), which opens with an epigraph from Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Luria declares that his intention in writing the book was to take his readers through the glass to explore the unfamiliar world on the other side: 'Together with little Alice we will slip past the smooth, cold surface of the looking glass and find ourselves in a wonderland, where everything is at once so familiar and recognisable, yet so strange and uncommon.'²⁰⁸

Before leaving Moscow on the second expedition to Central Asia in 1932, Luria and his team attended a screening of Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929), which was released in Russian under the approved title *The Old and the New*. The film depicts the transformative impact of technology on the traditional agrarian countryside. In her discussion of the film's relation to contemporaneous Soviet discourse, Anne Nesbet cites a bellicose speech delivered by Stalin in 1927:

That which is dying out does not just want to get on with it and die, but rather fights for its existence, insists on its own outlived business. Here there is always something being born into life something new. But that which is born is not simply born, but wails and cries, insisting on its right to exist. (Voices: 'True!' Applause). The battle between old and new, between that which is

which Vygotsky and Luria strove to inaugurate) might be capable of acknowledging the historicity of nature as outlined by Adorno in his 1932 essay 'The Idea of Natural History,' *Telos*, 60 (1984), 111-124. A similar conclusion is reached by John Bellamy Foster in *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York, NY; Monthly Review Press, 2000).

²⁰⁸ Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*, trans. by Lynn Solotaroff (London; Penguin Books, 1975), p. 5.

dying out and that which is being born - this is the basis of our development.²⁰⁹

Stalin depicted the fight between old and new ways of life, tradition and modernity, capitalism and communism, by imagining the latter as a vulnerable newly born baby. Luria's experiments in Central Asia celebrated the birth of the new but bore witness to the tenacity of the old (and it was for this reason that his work was eventually denounced). This struggle between the old and the newly born also informed Luria's work on child psychology. The study of actual newly born babies was central to the question of historical development posed by Stalin. However, as we shall see, the wails and cries of those born into Soviet life were often subordinated to the voices of those conducting their 'own outlived business'. The tension between domination and emancipation remained unresolved.

²⁰⁹ Joseph Stalin, XV s'ezd vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (b), [opened 2 December 1927] (Moscow, Leningrad; Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), p. 71, cited in Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctions: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London; IB Tauris, 2003) p. 98.

Chapter 3

The Child: Between Transformation and Stabilisation

The dream of having children is merely a beggarly stimulus when it is not imbued with the dream of a new nature of things in which these children might one day live, or for which they can struggle [...] (Herein lies the inextinguishable claim of the Fourierist utopia, a claim which Marx had recognised (and which Russia had begun to act on).)¹

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

The Revolution has radically changed the attitude of children to parents [...] The division between a generation of parents and children in Russia today may be the chasm between two social orders.²

Ella Winter, *Red Virtue*, 1933

Playtime for the modern child in Russia is a part of its apprenticeship to the world being built for it.³

Ethel Mannin, 'Playtime of the Child in Modern Russia', 1935

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. and trans. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA; Belnap Press, 1999), p. 342. This chapter owes a lot to Richard Braude and Sam Dolbear with whom I collaborated on a project on Asja Lacis, Walter Benjamin and Moscow.

² Ella Winter, *Red Virtue: Human Relationships in the New Russia* (New York, NY, Harcourt Brace and Co, 1933), pp. 216-217.

³ Ethel Mannin, 'Playtime of the Child in Modern Russia' in Hubert Griffith ed., *Playtime in Russia* (London; Methuen, 1935), pp. 136-183, p. 182.

Introduction

In 1958 Luria met the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott at an international conference in Copenhagen. Winnicott subsequently contacted Luria to ask whether his paper ‘The First Year of Life’ would be of interest to Russian psychologists. He concluded his letter by noting: ‘It interests me very much that babies are really the same everywhere.’⁴ Written at the height of the Cold War, when animosity between East and West was at its zenith, Winnicott’s comment seems intended as an oblique gesture of empathy across the ideological divide. Regardless of his personal views on the subject, the continued restrictions on psychoanalytic publications in the Soviet Union would have prevented Luria from facilitating a translation. Furthermore, the British psychoanalyst’s emphasis on universality was at odds with Luria’s research with children, which was enmeshed with the Soviet state’s intention to forge subjects that would fundamentally differ from their Western counterparts; Luria emphasised particular goals over shared origins.

Despite Luria’s early engagement with Freud, his conceptualisation of the child was markedly different in emphasis from psychoanalytic accounts developed in post-war Britain, and his exposure to psychoanalytic debates after 1930 was limited. Like Winnicott, Luria was concerned with the child’s adjustment to its environment, the development of the imagination, and language acquisition, but the family, the child’s relationship to the mother, gender difference and childhood sexuality – some of the central tenets of psychoanalytic theories of childhood - are conspicuous by their almost complete absence from Luria’s writings on child psychology. As Denise Riley discusses in her piercing analysis of post-war British developmental psychology *War in the Nursery* (1983), ‘generally held notions – of what an individual is, what society is – slip, uncriticised into child psychology’.⁵ The absence of certain concerns from Luria’s work signal the presence of an understanding of psychological development organised according to particular

⁴ D.W. Winnicott to Luria, July 7 1960, London, Wellcome Collection (WC), D.W. Winnicott Papers, PP/DWW/B/B/8, Letters 1938-1968. This is the only letter to Luria in the Winnicott archive suggesting that Luria did not respond to his request.

⁵ Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London; Virago, 1983), pp. 7-8.

precepts and elaborated in a specific social and political milieu where notions of what individuals and society were or might become were still unsettled.

The child was central to Soviet ideology. Were babies all born alike? What influence did hereditary, class, nationality and education have on the child? What was the optimal upbringing for a Soviet citizen? What would happen to the family under communism? What role would the state play in rearing children? The two decades following the revolution witnessed profound shifts in the Soviet state's attitude to children yet, as Lisa Kirschenbaum argues, 'the happy child as icon of socialist transformation remained.'⁶

In the aftermath of the revolution, bold utopians dreamt of the withering away of the family and the construction of a new collective existence:

The new cities will bring about such drastic changes in life relationships that the words 'my children' and 'my parents' will lose the meaning of ownership and will no longer be used. An entirely new scheme of life will develop when a family of several thousand people live in a commune, with all the children growing up together and every adult contributing his share for their education.⁷

The institutions and relationships that formed the basis for a child's upbringing were all subject to change – gender roles in the workplace, family structures, housing, dining, education, childcare. Often contradictory ideas aimed at eviscerating old forms of everyday life [*byt*] challenged every aspect of quotidian existence. The 1918 family code prohibited children from being adopted by individual families, positing the state as the guardian of its young citizens in an attempt to radically reimagine traditional family structures. The fledgling Soviet government legalised divorce and abortion, secularised marriage and encouraged women to enter the workforce in unprecedented numbers.⁸ However, women themselves, who were

⁶ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), p. 163.

⁷ William Clark Trow, *Character Education in Soviet Russia* (Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Press, 1934), p. 28.

⁸ On the impact of Soviet legislation and Communist Party rhetoric on women, see: Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet family policy and social life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993), Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University

often depicted as neglectful or incompetent mothers in need of state guidance, were not always seen as the prime beneficiaries of these policies. According to Lynn Mally, ‘women embodied all the problems of the past, but children were the hope of the future.’⁹ New baby names proliferated in the years after the revolution, accompanied by new atheistic naming ceremonies. Populating the world with ‘humans called Spark, Joy, Will, Electric, Rebel and Barricade’ or variations on Marx, Engels, Robespierre and Rosa Luxembourg was an aspirational gesture, as if the very act of naming alone might bring a world of heroic brightness into being.¹⁰

Unlike Vygotsky, who is primarily renowned as an educationalist and developmental psychologist both in the former Soviet Union and in the West, Luria’s legacy is primarily tied to his post-war work in neurology.¹¹ But Luria also published works on child psychology throughout his long career.¹² His most intensive period of experimenting with children was from the late 1920s until 1936.¹³ During this period Luria was re-training as a neurologist in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov, where he began to work on the localisation of brain function. From 1931-1934 Luria split his time between Kharkov and Moscow, returning permanently to the capital in 1934, the year of Vygotsky’s death.

Press, 1978) and Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁹ Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1990), p. 180. On paternalistic propaganda aimed at mothers see, David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 88-117.

¹⁰ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1989), pp. 111-112.

¹¹ An international bibliographical overview on Vygotsky demonstrates this tendency in the secondary literature: Mohamed Elhammouni, *Socio-Historicocultural Psychology: Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), Bibliographical Notes* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1997). For a recent example of the application of Vygotsky’s work aimed at practicing educators, see Robert Lake, *Vygotsky on Education: A Primer* (New York, NY, Peter Lang, 2012). A critical appraisal of the influence of Vygotsky on Western Developmental Psychology is given in Erica Burman, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (Hove; Routledge, 2008), pp. 241-260.

¹² Evgenia D. Homskaya, *Alexander Romanovich Luria: A Scientific Biography*, trans. by Daria Krotova (New York, Plenum Press, 2001), pp. 127-161. For an insight into Luria’s continued engagement with educational institutions see the British educationalist Brian Simon’s accounts of a trip to the USSR in 1961. Luria acted as Simon’s host coordinating a trip to psychological and educational institutes in Moscow, Leningrad and Tbilisi. See, London, Institute of Education (IOE), Brian Simon Archive, Book 5 1957-63, DC/SIM/1/72.

¹³ Luria and Vygotsky were also engaged in ‘Defectology’, a Soviet discipline dedicated to studying disabled children. A discussion of their extensive publications and research in this field (which Luria also engaged in in the post-war period) are beyond the scope of this thesis. Although Luria and Vygotsky analysed young people at various stages of development, from birth to adolescence. My focus in this chapter will be on children under seven, typically referred to as ‘preschoolers’ [*doshkolniki*] in Soviet pedagogical literature.

Luria and Vygotsky were both associated with Pedology, a discipline dedicated to the study of childhood that was briefly ascendant in Soviet psychology during the period of the First Five Year Plan (1928-32). Pedology was intended as the comprehensive science of the child. Yet so divergent are secondary accounts of the discipline's history that Alexei Kozulin's assertion that, 'almost all work in educational psychology in the 1920s was called "pedology"' seems to accurately summarise the scope of the project.¹⁴ Pedology was not born on Soviet soil. Its first practitioner was G. Stanley Hall, the American psychologist responsible for Freud's famous visit to the USA in 1909. A pedological institute was founded in Russia that year. But as the discipline dwindled in importance in Western Europe and America, its popularity grew in the USSR, reaching its peak in the early 1930s, as Stalin was consolidating his power. In April 1928, the Planning Commission for Pedological Research in Russia was set up. Former psychoanalyst turned fervent communist ideologue Aron Zalkind was appointed its chairman. The journal *Pedology* also started that year. The first All-Union Pedological Congress was held in 1928 and ran for a week. Approximately 3,000 delegates attended the event, including high ranking party leaders. Nikolai Bukharin, leader of the 'right opposition', addressed the Congress in a speech that lasted two hours, laying the foundations for the new science's methodological approach. The link between children and the industrial future of the Soviet state was clearly stated:

We need to direct our strength not into abstract chatter, but into an effort to produce a certain number of living workers in the shortest time frame; qualified, specially schooled machines that we can start up right away and set into motion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Alexei Kozulin, *Psychology in Utopia: Toward a Social History of Soviet Psychology* (Boston; MIT, 1984), p. 22. For accounts of the history of pedology in the Soviet Union see: Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology*, (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 116-127, *Making Education Soviet, 1917-1953*, ed. by Andy Byford and Polly Jones (London; Routledge, 2006), Alexander Etkind, 'Pedological Perversions' in *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia* trans. by Noah and Maria Rubins (Boulder, CO; West View Press, 1997), pp. 259-285, David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1989), pp. 345-354, Elena Minkova, 'Pedology as a Complex Science Devoted to the Study of Children in Russia: The History of its Origin and Elimination', *Psychological Thought*, 5, 2 (2012), 83-98. For a useful anthology of primary texts in translation, see: F. A. Fradkin, ed., *A Search in Pedagogics*, trans. by Peter Emerson (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1990). An early bibliographical overview is provided in N. Pybnikov, *Russkaia Pedologicheskaja Literatura* (Orel, Krasnaya Kniga, 1925).

¹⁵ From Speeches at the First Pedological Conference (1928), cited in Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible*, p. 265.

This statement by the practicing pedologist M. Gel'mont conveys the rhetoric typical of the discipline:

The foundations of the old social order are disappearing under the huge building of socialism. A new socialist life is being created and a human transformation is occurring. The old proprietary and individualistic habits are being eradicated and a communistic attitude towards work and life is being formed.¹⁶

Pedologists were to play a crucial role in education. Most schools across the Soviet Union had a resident pedologist and teachers were encouraged to record the behaviour of their students.¹⁷ By 1930 the Psychological Institute in Moscow was renamed the Institute of Psychology, Pedology and Industrial Psychology with Zalkind replacing Luria and Vygotsky's former boss Kornilov as its director.

Communism, however, could not be constructed overnight. As with everything in the post-revolutionary period, the concrete conditions of the present brushed up against abstract visions of the future. Despite the radical concrete changes that were wrought in Soviet social life, the impact and implementation of reforms were often hampered by material constraints and more traditional structures and practices persisted. Soviet theories of childhood, like actual Soviet children, were forced to contend with the realities of a country ravaged first by war and revolution and later by rapid industrialisation and the collectivisation of agriculture. By the time the Bolsheviks seized power, maintaining the *status quo* was not even an option, but a new social order structured according to a new set of norms gradually began to emerge from the wreckage of the old. As the revolution faded on the historical horizon, a stable world began to be built, which still paradoxically defined itself as being characterised by immolation and innovation. Situated between revolutionary transformation and the consolidation of an emerging order of things, the Soviet child embodied the paradox of Soviet society.

¹⁶ M Gel'mont, 'Pedologo-Pedagogicheskoe Izuchenie Kollektivizirovannogo truda i byta' ['Pedological and Pedagogical Research in the Field of Collective Work and Everyday Life'], *Pedologiya*, 1, 13 (1931), 17-23 (citation a modification of the summary on p. 71). Aron Zalkind gives a characteristically forceful programmatic outline of pedology in *Pedologiya v SSSR [Pedology in the USSR]* (Moscow, Rabotnik Prosveshcheniya, 1929).

¹⁷ On the impact of pedology on Soviet schools, see Larry E. Holmes, *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School no. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), pp. 137-141.

Walter Benjamin, who visited Moscow in the winter of 1926-27, noted that the slowing down of the revolutionary tempo sat awkwardly alongside the drive to educate a new revolutionary generation:

An attempt is being made to arrest the dynamic of revolutionary progress in the life of the state – one has entered, like it or not, a period of restoration while nonetheless wanting to store up the revolutionary energy of youth like electricity in a battery.¹⁸

Benjamin described a fresh political mood turning stale. He also detected a waning of enthusiasm in the revolutionary generation, which he described as a process of premature ageing:

The generation that was active in the civil war years is growing old in vitality, if not in years. It is as if stabilisation had admitted to their lives the calm, sometimes even the apathy that is usually brought about only by old age.¹⁹

Benjamin suggested that the once youthful vigour of the revolution itself had been lost. A contradiction between transformation and consolidation also animated Luria's theorisations of the revolutionary child, but unlike Benjamin he framed the maturation of both individuals and the state in positive terms. Luria aligned ageing with progress, rather than seeing it as a form of deterioration, detachment and waning strength. In the context of a discussion of nineteenth-century pedagogy, Benjamin declared that 'the adult was the ideal in whose image the educator aspired to mould the child.'²⁰ This aspiration also structured Luria's work.

This chapter will contrast Luria's writings on childhood with Benjamin's, in order to probe the contradictory figure of the revolutionary child, caught between routine and rupture, revolution and reproduction, transformation and stabilisation. Benjamin and Luria's contemporaneous works shared a commitment to Marxism, but nonetheless reveal very different attitudes toward children, which betray crucial differences between their political visions. Benjamin hoped that visiting Moscow would help him to decide whether to join the Communist Party. He had also been commissioned to write an entry for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* on Goethe.

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, ed. by Gary Smith, trans. by Richard Sieburth (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 53.

¹⁹ Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 45

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Toys and Play' (1928) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. by Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), pp. 117-121, p. 118.

Unlike Luria, whose Encyclopaedia entry on ‘Imagination’ is discussed in detail below, Benjamin’s contribution to this standard state-issued reference work was ultimately not accepted for publication.²¹ This seemingly trivial episode indicates that Luria marched in step with official Soviet discourse, while Benjamin followed a more idiosyncratic path. Benjamin never joined the Communist Party; he remained a heterodox Marxist. Working within the Soviet system, such an approach was not available to Luria, especially as the 1930s unfolded.

Benjamin’s writings on childhood provide an alternative vision of revolutionary childhood, setting Luria’s ideas into relief. Both Benjamin and Luria assumed some correlate existed between individual and historical development, between the ontogenetic and the phylogenetic; the question of childhood was a revolutionary question not only because children played a role in history but because they provided a model for understanding historical development. By contrasting Benjamin’s work on children with Luria’s, I hope to draw attention to the constraints of the latter’s Marxist-Leninist model in order to recover some moments of revolutionary energy and childishness persisting amid the processes of stabilisation and maturation it outlined.

The New-born Baby: From Organic Passivity to Historical Activity

‘Imagine a man in whom all the links connecting him with the environment are cut off one after another; he turns out to be completely isolated from the world, a lone person amidst the world of things that do not exist for him.’²² This is how Luria and Vygotsky characterise the new born baby in ‘The Child and its Behaviour’ (1930), also likening it to an anchorite monk. They begin by attacking those who would present the child as an adult in miniature. This representational fallacy, they say, is typical of ‘primitive’ people, and can also be observed in the history of art, which is littered with images of the baby Jesus whose bodily proportions resemble those of a

²¹ The first edition of the encyclopaedia was edited by Otto Schmidt who, along with his wife Vera, played a prominent role in the Russian psychoanalytic community discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Vera Schmidt, a former colleague of Luria, went on to work with Vygotsky at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. See Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible*, pp. 179-224.

²² Luria and Vygotsky, ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’ in Vygotsky and Luria in *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Know (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), pp. 140-231, p. 145.

grown man. Luria and Vygotsky insist instead that the child is a 'very special type of creature, who qualitatively differs from an adult and whose laws of life and activity should undoubtedly be studied with particular attention.'²³

The baby's initial stage of 'irradiated arousal' is only gradually replaced by more stable perceptions.²⁴ The authors claim that young children continue to be solitary, passive and organic, concerned only with their own comfort. Young infants are 'parasitic'.²⁵ They have yet to encounter the obstacles presented by reality and seek only to satisfy their immediate wants. Similarly, speech for the young child is not used to communicate with others but is addressed to the self alone. Here, Luria and Vygotsky cite research conducted by Jean Piaget into egocentric speech. Although they acknowledge universal characteristics in very young children, they note suggestively that Piaget's conclusions are specific to the environment in which he conducted his experiments: 'Our children, developing in a different environment, may show different results.'²⁶ However, Luria and Vygotsky's description of the baby displays none of the attributes that the Soviet state hoped to inculcate in its ideal citizens. Elsewhere, Luria explicitly declares that children are full of 'shortcomings and inconsistencies,'²⁷ outlining their inadequacies before asking, 'what, really, can we expect from such a creature?'²⁸ But he was concerned with tracing the process by which humans overcome this initial stage of life through a series of dialectical transformations.

Writing in 1931, Vygotsky outlined the methodological differences between Soviet pedology and its Western predecessors. Pedology, he argued, had not survived in the West, due to the inability of its practitioners to meaningfully combine approaches from various disciplines. The child, Vygotsky claimed, is a unique object and cannot be understood by falsely separating the physical from the psychological, the external from the internal, the biological from the social. Faced with the child's

²³ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Child...', p. 145.

²⁴ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Child...', p. 144

²⁵ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Child...', p. 150

²⁶ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Child...', p. 155. Although later they note that their colleagues repeated many of Piaget's experiments and came to the same conclusions (p. 167).

²⁷ Luria, 'Paths of Development of Thought in the Child', in *Selected Writings of Alexander Luria*, ed. by Michael Cole (White Plains, NY; ME Sharpe, 1978), pp. 97-144, p. 99. First Published in Russian in *Estestvoznaniye i Marksizm*, 2 (1929), 97-130.

²⁸ Luria, 'Paths...' p. 124.

complex developmental transformations, these Western pedologists were unable ‘to consciously reflect the dialectical nature of child development.’²⁹ Vygotsky claimed that a new methodology was required to grasp the unity (but not the identity) of mental and physiological processes, of thinking and being, of appearance and experience, of the general and the particular. Western pedologists were able to identify links between different phenomena (for example between intellect and memory, education and nourishment) but ‘deprived them of any internal integrity and structure’ and instead described nothing more than disconnected particles; ‘a heap of broken glass [...] a pile of broken atoms.’³⁰ By adopting a dialectical methodology informed by Marx, Soviet psychologists could, Vygotsky claimed, overcome these deficiencies. Such an approach would not only describe how different psychological phenomena related to one another, but would also situate the child in its particular social, cultural and historical environment. According to Vygotsky, the dialectical psychologist should consider nothing in isolation.

Dialectics for Vygotsky was not only a scientific methodology but also provided a model for understanding how the child itself developed. Like the Communist state’s understanding of historical and economic development, pedologists carved childhood into discrete stages with a dialectical transformation occurring at each phase of transition.³¹ Vygotsky described human life as an ‘ascent up the stages of development’ in which stable periods were punctuated by crises.³² He explicitly likened this to revolutionary historical processes. During stable periods ‘development proceeds as if underground,’³³ but then a crisis erupts at which point ‘development takes on a stormy, impetuous and sometimes catastrophic character that resembles a revolutionary course of events.’³⁴ As Carolyn Steedman discusses in the context of Western European psychology, ‘the child’s developing body and mind

²⁹ Lev Vygotsky, ‘K voprosu o pedagogii i smezhnykh s neyu naukakh’ [‘On the Question of Pedology and Adjacent Disciplines’], *Pedologiya*, No. 3, 1931, 53-58, p. 58.

³⁰ Vygotsky, ‘K Voprosu...’, p. 58.

³¹ See, Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’ (1932-34) *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky, Vol. 5*, trans. by Marie J. Hall, ed. by Robert W Riener (New York, NY; Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 187-205, p. 196. The Communist Party was structured into successive age groups: Young Octoberists (8-10), Pioneers (10-14), Komsomol (14-28). After passing through these stages a person could finally become a Communist proper. See, Stanislav A. Pedan, *Partiia i Komsomol, 1918-1945 [Party and Komsomol]* (Leningrad, 1979).

³² Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’, p. 188.

³³ Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’, p. 188.

³⁴ Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’, p. 191.

could be understood as the epitome of a more general historical progress.³⁵ In his delineation of the different stages of childhood, Vygotsky does not explicitly align the stages of human development with particular historical epochs (for example, by comparing ancient Greece to infancy as Marx had done).³⁶ Rather than mapping the content of thought across history onto individual human life, the analogy was instead intended to describe the *form* of developmental transition, characterised by ‘abrupt and major shifts and displacements, changes and discontinuities.’³⁷ The process he described was not smooth but uneven: ‘the development of the child is a dialectical process in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished not along an evolutionary, but along a revolutionary path.’³⁸

This development was not, however, seen to occur outside of history. As outlined in his critique of Western pedagogy, organic and historical factors were said to intersect. This emphasis on history is what differentiates this model of developmental stages from that proposed by Piaget.³⁹ Although certain developments were considered innate and biological (for example, teething or puberty) Luria and Vygotsky also insisted that these could not be understood in isolation from social factors. They demonstrate this by way of an agricultural metaphor:

At first, the earth produced as much as the natural conditions (its properties, weather, germination of random seeds) permitted; with cultural management and new conditions - fertiliser, development of better tools and maintenance - it began to yield a far greater harvest, and gradually (under prolonged cultural [*sic*]) the earth itself changed and proved to have adapted to maximum production.⁴⁰

³⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 85.

³⁶ Marx described ancient Greece as the childhood of humanity: ‘Does not in every epoch the child represent the character of the period in its natural veracity? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm because it is a stage that will never recur?’ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 217.

³⁷ Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’, p. 191.

³⁸ Vygotsky, ‘The Problem of Age’, p. 193.

³⁹ Piaget’s key works from this period are: Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1926), *The Child’s Conception of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1928) and *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1932). A discussion of the ways in which Vygotsky’s theories were posthumously mobilised against Piaget’s model by American and British psychologists in the post-war years is beyond the scope of this thesis. Piaget and Luria corresponded and were on friendly terms. In some comments on Vygotsky, Piaget refers to Luria as a friend and outlines some of the divergences between his theories and those of his Soviet contemporaries. See, Jean Piaget, *Comments on Vygotsky’s Critical Remarks* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1962).

⁴⁰ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’, p. 212.

Just as Soviet agricultural policies aimed to apply technological innovations to the natural material of the earth in order to yield vast grain outputs, Soviet psychologists hoped that the natural material of the child could be enhanced by cultural means.

For Luria, the specificities of the ‘cultural-industrial’ environment constituted the decisive factor in determining how the individual develops. This was consistent with the rhetoric of the First Five Year Plan. M. Ilin’s children’s book *The Story of the First-Five Year Plan* (1931) asked: ‘Why have we begun all this tremendous work? Why do we mine millions of tons of coal and ore? Why do we build millions of machines? Do we do these things merely to change Nature?’⁴¹ The response – that changing nature would change humanity – was one that psychologists were well placed to address. In the Soviet Union, it was declared, modernity had succeeded in conquering nature, creating a technological environment which altered human thought in turn. Luria and Vygotsky celebrated the artificial accretions that extend human capacities. Tools and language were central to their account of human development. Indeed, they described a child’s ‘entrance into life’ not as its birth, but as its initiation into the cultural world.⁴² Walter Benjamin similarly noted that ‘little babies’ gained entry into the ‘Communist hierarchy’ in Russia ‘the moment they are able to point to the picture of Lenin.’⁴³ The passive infant transforms into an active subject.

Luria, drawing on Engels, emphasised that the formation of ‘advanced’ dialectical thinking came about through a relationship between people and their environment. He was concerned with the development of capacities that allowed the subject to exert an influence on their environment. For Luria, human subjects and external objects were mutually constituted: only through this transformative encounter could human thought ascend to a ‘higher’ stage. The dialectic between people and their surroundings constituted the basis of historical progress and precipitated the development of dialectical thinking:

⁴¹ M. Ilin, *The Story of the First-Five Year Plan: Russia’s Primer* (Cambridge, MA; Houghton Mifflin, 1931), p. 148 cited in Goldman, p. 284.

⁴² Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’ p. 145.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, *Selected Writings, Vol. 2.*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Others, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 22-46, p. 26.

What traits have we become accustomed to seeing in behaviour guided by dialectical thinking? A keen regard for the real, the ability to take into account all sorts of changing conditions. So as to be able not only to adapt to the real world but also to predict its dynamics and to adapt it to oneself; a considerable plasticity and flexibility of behaviour that enable one to make use of different devices and different means, depending on the situation; and, finally, the definitive rejection of all pat, ossified forms of behaviour – these are the traits of behaviour that best reflect the dialectical method of thinking.⁴⁴

Luria concludes this description of ‘advanced’ thought by remarking that ‘it is just these traits that we do not observe in the behaviour of the small child.’⁴⁵ His work with children was therefore directed at encouraging the development of this mode of perception from the youngest possible age. In attempting to construct the ideal communist subject, however, Luria’s psychological methodologies, as we shall see, were often not as critical of ‘pat, ossified forms of behaviour’ as this statement suggests.

According to Luria, the baby adapts to its environment through experience. The senses develop in tandem with memory. Eventually the ‘accidental, separate and fluctuating scraps’ of jumbled perceptions are replaced by more stable and complete pictures.⁴⁶ But as the external world becomes gradually more orderly, it begins to merge with the child’s inner world: ‘In perceiving the world holistically, the small child at the same time often loses the boundary separating reality from fantasy, the present from the past, what exists from what is desired.’⁴⁷ As a result, the child continues ‘to hatch up unusually vivid fantasies’ in order to live between two worlds.⁴⁸ For Luria, the transition to adulthood involves developing the ability to keep these two realms firmly apart. It is only then that the individual will be able to exert ‘an efficient influence on the world.’⁴⁹ A process of cultural reconstruction must occur for the child to shed fantasies and ascend to the adult stage, adapted to (and therefore capable of adapting) the external world. Play plays a key role here.

⁴⁴ Luria, ‘Paths...’ p. 99.

⁴⁵ Luria, ‘Paths...’ p. 99.

⁴⁶ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’ p. 148.

⁴⁷ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’ p. 149.

⁴⁸ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’, p. 149.

⁴⁹ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Child...’, p. 151.

All Work and No Play: Soviet Toys

Vygotsky and Luria's *Ape, Primitive and Child*, first published in 1930, explores three distinct forms of psychological development: evolutionary, cultural and individual. In their introduction, the authors explain that in each case they are interested in describing a qualitative, dialectical transformation that concerns the development of 'auxiliary means'. The term comes from a passage by Francis Bacon which forms the book's epigraph: 'A bare hand and a mind by itself are worth not that much: everything is performed with the help of tools and auxiliary means.'⁵⁰ In the context of childhood, toys and games are understood as one such tool.

Luria discusses play in the entry he wrote on 'Imagination' for the 1929 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, which begins by identifying two distinct forms of imagination:

passive or reproductive imagination, which consists of recalling images of past experience in the memory without substantially changing them, and active or productive imagination, a different process which involves combining the results of experience [to create] new images.⁵¹

Imagination is said to play a role in all intellectual, practical and creative activities, as well as in dreaming and in waking fantasy. Imagination relies on the capacity to 'spontaneously call forth images that are not drawn directly from environmental stimuli.'⁵² Luria characterises imagining as a visual process that involves creating new images in the mind. Although this relies on memory it involves more than a 'mere repetition' of previous experience. The non-immediacy of imagination is not, however, irregular or anarchic but is governed by laws which, he says, psychologists are capable of analysing and describing. He goes on to discuss the centrality of the imaginative capacity in children, claiming that 'distinguishing reality from the

⁵⁰ Vygotsky and Luria, *Ape, Primitive and Child*, p. 40. In the English translation this is included as an epigraph to the opening chapter whereas in the Russian it is given a separate page at the beginning of the whole book. See, L. S. Vygotsky and A. R. Luria, *Etiudi po Istorii Povedeniia: Obez'iana, Primitiv, Pebionok* (Moscow, Gosudastvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1930) p. 7. This is a very minor deviation. Overall, the English translation does not depart substantially from the Russian text.

⁵¹ Luria, 'Voobrazhenie' ['Imagination'], *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, tom 13*, ed. by Otto Schmidt (Moscow, Aktsioneroe Obschestvo Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1929), pp. 120-121.

⁵² Luria, 'Voobrazhenie' ['Imagination'], p. 121.

imaginary comes only at a certain stage of development.⁵³ For Luria, this capacity to differentiate develops through play.

For Luria, play is simultaneously reproductive and creative; it participates in children's ascension to a higher cognitive level. The function of play is not to invent alternate realities, new worlds or original narratives, however; games are a rehearsal for adult life. Luria may have criticised representations of children as tiny adults, yet he was dedicated to ensuring these peculiar creatures adopted the features of their adult progenitors as swiftly as possible. This understanding of play was attuned to the Soviet goal of creating fervent revolutionaries dedicated to constructing a new world, but it fails to conceive of the child's distinct modes of perception as disruptive in their own right. Here, Benjamin's writings on childhood provide a provocative counterpoint.

Benjamin returned from Moscow to Berlin in 1927 with a bag full of hand-crafted toys collected from street vendors in the Soviet Capital (Plates 3.1-3.3). The following year he wrote a number of articles on childhood focusing on the concept of play. In the 1928 review essay 'Toys and Play', Benjamin invokes the discussion of repetition in play in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In Freud's essay, which Luria had co-written the introduction to in 1925, Freud gives the example of incessant repetitions in play as a phenomenon that demonstrates the 'mysterious masochistic trends of the ego'.⁵⁴ Freud describes a game in which a spool is continually thrown away and retrieved by a child. Fort/da, fort/da, fort/da: the child repeats in play the distressing experience of his mother's departure in order to master his own feelings of abandonment and to exact revenge on his deserter. The game represents an early example of instinctual renunciation through which the child learns to forego immediate gratification and adapt to the constraints imposed by the reality principle. Through play the child transforms from a passive to an active subject: 'At the outset he was in a passive situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part.'⁵⁵ For Benjamin, however, repetition in play is not only about

⁵³ Luria, 'Voobrazhenie' ['Imagination'], p. 121.

⁵⁴ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', *Standard Edition*, Vol. 18, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 10.

overcoming past trauma, but also has a celebratory aspect which opens up the possibility of new triumphs in the future. Returning to the beginning represents the - 'reinstatement of the original condition' - the possibility of starting afresh.⁵⁶ The game thus represents the possibility of breaking with established trajectories. For Benjamin, the child in play emerges as an autonomous subject who can constantly renegotiate the course of events by starting over again and again and again.⁵⁷

Play here mediates between routine and rupture. Through experimentations with inanimate objects the child familiarises itself with external rhythms and structures. Games orient the child to the world, and are crucial for teaching the 'struggling little brat' to perform simple everyday activities: eating, sleeping, dressing and washing.⁵⁸ As outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the relationship between life and death instincts is a relationship of assimilation to dissimilation, of construction to destruction (the oppositional tension which, I argued in Chapter 1, Luria and Vygotsky attempted to do away with in their discussion of Freud's essay). Benjamin suggests that play is animated by a similarly paradoxical temporality. Play represents 'the transformation of a shattering experience into habit', but this habit crucially retains its shattered qualities. Early playful experience ossifies over time but the creative and exuberant origins of habit die hard: 'Habit enters life as a game, and in habit, even in its most sclerotic forms, an element of play survives to the end.'⁵⁹ Benjamin suggests that even within the most routinised activities an element of discovery persists. The childlike zeal for repetition lives on, which implies that the capacity to remake the world survives with it.

This contradictory characterisation of play intersects suggestively with Luria's distinction between reproductive and productive imagination. For Luria, however, the establishment of habit assembles the shattered perception of the child

⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Toys and Play' (1928) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 117-121, p. 120.

⁵⁷ Compare this with Luria's insistence that childhood play is governed by 'conservative repetition' (*Paths...*, p. 103). This argument is engaged with by Vygotsky in his 1933 essay 'Play and Its Role in the Mental Development of the Child'. Without mentioning Freud by name Vygotsky explicitly discusses the renunciation of short-term pleasure and gratification as characteristic of play and discusses play as an arena for the 'realization of unrealizable desires' in terms strikingly similar to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. See, Vygotsky 'Play and Its Role in the Mental Development of the Child', *Soviet Developmental Psychology*, pp. 76-99 (based on a stenographic record of a lecture given in 1933 at the Herten Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad).

⁵⁸ Benjamin, 'Toys and Play', p. 120.

into a smooth, unbroken whole; habit succeeds shattering. As with his interpretation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which attempted to remove the contradiction and negativity from Freud's theory, Luria's definition of childhood occludes any consideration of the generative potential of the tenacity of earlier phases of development in adulthood. The alternative vision of childhood proposed by Benjamin points to disavowed internal contradictions that persist in Luria's more neat teleological account.

'Everyone must have seen a child reaching his hands toward the moon hoping to grasp it,'⁶⁰ Luria and Vygotsky write in 'The Child and His Behaviour'. They claim that the child reaching towards the moon is in the process of learning to master space and perspective. It has yet to understand perspective; everything it can see is therefore assumed to be close at hand. The example functions to demonstrate the child's inability to fully comprehend its situation. Benjamin employs the same analogy to explain his political approach to history (here inspired by Charles Fourier's understanding of explosivity): 'the idea of revolution as an innervation of the technical organs of the collective (analogy with the child who learns to grasp by trying to get hold of the moon)'.⁶¹ Benjamin subverts the conventional understanding presented by Luria and Vygotsky. He celebrates the child's unique perspective, linking it explicitly to 'the idea of "cracking open of natural teleology"'.⁶² The child is not constrained to its immediate surroundings but reaches up into the starry galaxies. This enlivening contact with the external world is likened to a technological transformation: 'the spark that ignites the powder of nature.'⁶³ Benjamin places the collective in the position of the child, recalling the observation he made of Moscow that 'the liberated pride of the proletariat is matched by the emancipated bearing of the children.'⁶⁴ The child, for Benjamin, is imagined as a utopian figure reaching beyond its natural limits to obtain something it desires. The example of the child grasping the moon reappears in a version of Benjamin's 'The

⁵⁹ Benjamin, 'Toys and Play', p. 120.

⁶⁰ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Child...', p. 147.

⁶¹ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 631.

⁶² Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 631.

⁶³ Benjamin, 'Expose of 1939', *The Arcades Project*, pp. 14-26, p. 17. This passage explicitly discusses Fourier's conception of explosion in the phalanstery, the same context in which Benjamin employs the moon analogy in *Convolute W*.

⁶⁴ Benjamin, 'Moscow' (1927), *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 22-46, p. 27.

Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (1936), in which the analogy between technological transformation and play, revolution and childhood is more explicitly articulated:

Revolutions are innervations of the collective or, more precisely, efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology. This second technology is a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing [*das Spiel*] with natural forces. Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach.⁶⁵

A Soviet children's journal launched in the 1920s was called 'Isgorka' – 'Sparklet' or 'Little Spark' (the diminutive of 'Iskra') - but Luria intended to defuse rather than detonate the explosive material of the child.

Benjamin's Moscow is a fairytale landscape moving to a rural rhythm. The city, he says, 'swarms with children everywhere', and its icy pavements, upon which one is forced to move clumsily and unsteadily, plunge the visitor back into childhood.⁶⁶ He describes dimly lit labyrinthine streets littered with hand-crafted objects. Nothing shines here apart from street vendors' baubles and the falling flakes of snow:

The smallest coloured rag glows out of doors. Picture books lie in the snow; Chinese vendors sell artfully made paper fans and, still more frequently, paper kites in the form of deep sea fish. Day in day out children's festivals are provided for. There are men with baskets full of wooden toys, carts and spades [...] their peasant origin clearly visible.⁶⁷

The frozen artisanal city Benjamin describes in *Moscow Diary* bears little resemblance to the modern communist future that he perceives the faint outlines of in Fyodor Gladkov's seminal Soviet novel *Cement* (1925).⁶⁸ Unlike Luria, whose developmental models sought to overcome the past, he did not, however, present the persistence of the past in the present as necessarily antithetical to the revolutionary

⁶⁵ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version' in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland and Others (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19-55, p. 45.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 26.

⁶⁷ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 24.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, 'Review of Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement*' (1927), *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 47-49.

project: for Benjamin, communism must redeem the past not obliterate it. Benjamin discusses the re-emergence of old forms of manufacturing that incorporate elements of the emerging society, like a lacquer box depicting a ‘Soviet Madonna with the Cigarettes’.⁶⁹ He perceived a ‘secret understanding’ between the traditional craftsperson and the child, and his accounts of Moscow dwell explicitly on the remnants of tradition in the midst of innovation, seeing them as imbued with oblique political hope.⁷⁰

After the onset of the First Five Year Plan in 1928, the street traders Benjamin described disappeared from Soviet cities, rounded up and arrested for ‘speculation’ in the campaign to eradicate the last vestiges of private enterprise.⁷¹ This coincided with a re-examination of Soviet state toy manufacturing. In 1930, *Komsomolskaia Pravda* published an article on ‘Soviet Toy Deficiencies’ attacking the continued existence of children’s toys and games that belonged to the pre-revolutionary era. Bourgeois interiors, ‘Philistine family furniture’, lavishly dressed dolls, animals dressed in human clothing, overfed clowns – toys were attacked for presenting misleading impressions of reality or for reproducing non-proletarian values. Instead, the article argued that ‘the factory should produce toys that correspond to the aims of communist education [...] In this rough and sometimes cruel circus world we want to amuse our proletarian children; but we must consider the quality of children’s laughter.’⁷² Toys should be appropriate to children’s role as builders of the communist future.

Benjamin noted the physical fragility of the traditional toys sheltered in the ‘safe asylum’ of the Moscow toy museum.⁷³ He also appreciated their historical fragility: ‘who knows how long even this kind of folk art can withstand the triumphant progress of technology which today sweeps across Russia. Already the demand for these things has supposedly died.’⁷⁴ In November 1931 the first

⁶⁹ Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, ‘Old Forgotten Children’s Books’ (1924), *Selected Writings, Vol. 1*, pp. 406-413, p. 412.

⁷¹ See, Alan M. Ball, *Russia’s Last Capitalists: the Nepmen, 1921-1929* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1987), pp. 78-79.

⁷² *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, June 1930 cited in Winter, p. 240.

⁷³ Benjamin, ‘Russian Toys’ (1930), *Moscow Diary*, pp. 123-124, p. 123.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, ‘Russian Toys’, p. 123. Benjamin describes buying the last remaining hand-crafted toys in a Moscow department store, where he is informed stocks will not be replaced as ‘there is no longer a market for them’, *Moscow Diary*, p. 91.

exhibition of children's toys was held in Moscow. In stark contrast to the simple and traditional objects hewn from 'wood, clay, bone, textiles, paper, papier-mache'⁷⁵ that Benjamin described after visiting the toy museum in Moscow, this presented a vision of industrialised Soviet society in miniature, with all traces of the past erased. The exhibition included a miniature model of the Dnipropetrovsk dam (one of the showpieces of the First Five Year Plan) and a tiny conveyor belt at which two shock brigades of Pioneers were set to work assembling toys (Plate 3.4). Like a living maquette of their Stakhanovite adult counterparts, the children were set in competition with one another; the importance of maximum efficiency and a love of work were to be instilled at the earliest stages of life.⁷⁶

In 1935, the Pedological and Pedagogical Laboratory, with which Luria was associated, published a study investigating children's play, using new Soviet toys; toys designed to prefigure a new way of life. It includes dolls corresponding to the nationalities of the Soviet Union and different class groups and games based on the *kolkhoz*, the Park of Culture and Rest, public dining rooms, public laundries, factories and modes of transport (particularly locomotives, an archetypal symbol of progressive Soviet modernity). Construction, mastery of complex narrative and cooperation are the central goals of these toys (Plates 3.5-3.6).⁷⁷

This emphasis on fostering efficiency and practicality was also evident in Luria's research. In 1934 Luria returned full-time to Moscow from Kharkov, where 750 set of twins were under observation at the Medico-Biological Institute in Moscow. Like his experiments in Central Asia, these investigations were addressed to fierce debates about nature versus nurture raging at that time. 'The Experimental Development of the Constructive Activity – on the Differential Training of Identical

⁷⁵ Benjamin, 'Russian Toys', p. 123. Benjamin also discusses the industrialisation of toy manufacture in 'The Cultural History of Toys' (1928), *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 113-116.

⁷⁶ See, Ella Winter, *Red Virtue*, p. 244. A history of Russian peasant toys published in 1933 ends with a chapter on contemporary toys made in the 'proletarian style', which include a crane and a pair of Red Army soldiers: N. Tseretelli, *Russkaya Krest'ianskaia Igrushka [Russian Peasant Toys]* (Moscow; Akademia, 1933). For an illustrated overview of the collection of the Zagorsk Museum of Toys, USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences see, G. L. Dain, *Ruskaia Igrushka [Russian Toys]* (Moscow, Sovietskaia Rossiia, 1987).

⁷⁷ E. Molozhavaya, *Siuzhetsnaia Igrushka – Tematika i Oformlenie [Toys - Theme and Design]* (Moscow/Leningrad; Vsesoyuznoe Kooperativnoe Ob'edlennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1935). An earlier collection of psychological investigations into children's relationships with toys overwhelmingly

twins' (1936), co-authored with A. N. Miranova, is based on the analysis of three pairs of seven-year old identical twins. Each pair of twins was separated to create two groups. The first group (E) were trained to passively copy figures composed of wooden blocks. The second group (M) were also trained to reproduce the composition, but were only shown the outline of the final shape, rather than the positioning of each individual block. The twins were then given a series of tests that required them to reproduce different figures on paper or to identify geometrical shapes in a puzzle (Plate 3.7). The second group was shown to be more capable of accurate reproduction than the first, even 18 months after the initial training has occurred. The capacity to accurately reproduce drawings and constructions was deemed the most desirable outcome of the experiment. Luria and Miranova claimed that creativity was required to accomplish this task; it was not a passive or automatic activity.⁷⁸ This, however, in tune with Luria's understanding of imagination, is a narrow definition of creativity which allows for the reproduction of existing forms but does not encourage children to invent their own constructions or images. Luria emphasises continuity over change, reproduction over revolution, habit over shattering.

In another paper, based on the same experiments, Luria is explicit that 'ad hoc creative play' is not conducive to learning and warns against allowing children's activities to 'degenerate into simple spur-of-the-moment play'.⁷⁹ Although he concedes that this form of play is more entertaining for the child, he argues that it has no pedagogic function as the child proceeds 'without an analysis of the objective properties with which [it] is playing'.⁸⁰ In this scenario chaos reigns: a wooden block might become a cow, a dog or a tree. The child manipulates everything according to its whim and does not learn to accommodate 'realistic' material constraints. The 'creative construction' involved in reproducing a structure from a model is, by contrast, deemed goal-oriented and constrained: 'the child is always obliged to

relied on traditional toys: N. A. Rybinkov ed., *Rebionok i igrushka [Children and Toys]*, (Moscow, 192-).

⁷⁸ A. R. Luria and A. N. Miranova, 'Eksperimentalnoye rasvitiye konstruktivnoy deyatelnosti' ['The Experimental Development of Constructive Activity'] (Moscow, Mediko-Geneticheskogo Institut, 1936), 487-505.

⁷⁹ Luria, 'The Development of Constructive Activity in the Preschool Child' (first published in 1948 but based on the experiments with twins undertaken with Miranova in the 1930s) in *The Selected Writings of Alexander Luria*, pp. 201-202.

⁸⁰ Luria, 'Development of Constructive Activity...' p. 199.

remain within the framework of constructive activity'.⁸¹ Luria wants to replace the fragmented perceptions of the child with the unified coherence of the adult. Giving free rein to the imagination might be fun but, Luria insists sternly, it has no practical social utility. Benjamin emphasised the revolutionary potential of the children's ad hoc and unconstrained perceptions, which envisaged worlds that departed from existing adult ones, whereas Luria hoped to train children to work within existing frameworks.

In Benjamin's work it is precisely the child's capacity to transform inert lumps of wood into ever-shifting imagined worlds that positively distinguishes it from the adult. Benjamin's *One Way Street* (1928) is dedicated to his lover and comrade Asja Lacis, whose illness occasioned his visit to Moscow, and whose relation to Bolshevism and role as the director of a Proletarian Children's Theatre exerted a strong influence on his work.⁸² In the passage 'Construction Site' Benjamin attacks contemporary toy manufacturers and educators whose 'infatuation with psychology' has led to a failure to appreciate the inventiveness of the child for whom any discarded object might become a toy. Children are concerned with 'haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on', a statement that superficially agrees with Luria's conclusions.⁸³ For Benjamin, however, children are not concerned with reproducing the adult activities being performed on those sites but with gleaning from and repurposing the detritus they generate:

In waste products [children] recognise the face of the world turned directly and solely to them. In using these things they do not so much imitate the world of adults as bring together, in the artefact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own smaller world of things within the greater one.⁸⁴

Crucially, this smaller creation is not a scale model of the adult world but a distinct and magical planet constructed according to childish principles. Benjamin suggests that the child is most creative when subverting the plans of adults, stating that the 'most enduring modifications in toys are never the work of adults [...] but are the result of children at play. Once mislaid, broken, and repaired, even the most princely

⁸¹ Luria, 'Development of Constructive Activity...' p. 201.

⁸² Lacis gives an account of her work in children's theatre in Anna Latsis, *Krasnaia Gvozдика [Red Carnation]* (Riga; Liesma, 1984).

⁸³ Benjamin, 'One Way Street' (1928), *Selected Writings, vol. 1*, pp. 444-488, p. 449.

doll becomes a capable proletarian comrade in the children's play commune.'⁸⁵ Soviet educators and psychologists imagined play as a rehearsal for work but Benjamin, drawing on Fourier, suggests the inverse: play provides an image of work freed from exploitation.⁸⁶

Luria's experiments focus on activities that require children to build or mould - wooden blocks and plasticine are his preferred research materials.⁸⁷ Learning how to construct and mould were also crucial steps in the construction and moulding of children. Unlike in Benjamin's work, creation here is prescriptive. In Luria's experiments children are praised for creating things that correspond to reality: reproducing an existing wooden structure is better than inventing a structure from scratch, making a plasticine table with four legs is better than making one with two. One child is praised for busying himself with the construction of a complex metro system including tunnels, stations and trains. His fierce resistance to the structure being disturbed by a playmate is given as an example of his cognitive progress: he 'restored the building and returned to playing with it.'⁸⁸ Mastering such activities paves the way for adult life. Perhaps the child would one day work building a real Soviet Metro system.⁸⁹ In Luria's account of childhood development, language also plays a key role in the construction of this pathway from disordered individualism to organised collectivity.

Language and Organisation

According to Luria, the capacity for abstract thinking is related to the capacity to plan, reproduce and organise. Abstraction in this definition is not connected to abstract forms of representation. In his analysis of children's drawings, for example,

⁸⁴ Benjamin, 'One Way Street' p. 449. This passage also appears in the earlier essay 'Old Forgotten Children's Books' (1924), *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 406-413, p. 408.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, 'Old Toys', *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 98-101, p. 101.

⁸⁶ 'To have instituted play as the canon of a labour no longer rooted in exploitation is one of the great merits of Fourier.' Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 361.

⁸⁷ For an example of an experiment with plasticine, see, *Speech...*, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Luria, *Speech...*, p. 91.

⁸⁹ The Moscow Metro was one of the major emblems of Stalinist modernity. It opened in 1935. Illustrated children's books celebrating the new construction, indicate the extent to which knowledge of such projects were addressed to children. See, Elizabeta Tarakhovskaya, *Metropoliten* (Moscow, Molodaya Gvardiya, 1933) and *Gotov! Rasskaz I stikhi o Metro* [*Ready! Stories and Poems about the Metro*] (Moscow; Detizdat, 1935).

Luria deems non-figurative scribbles a sign of underdevelopment. As with his experiments in Central Asia, it is the ability to think in concepts and to classify objects according to socially established criteria that represents the successful transition to a higher level of development. He does not celebrate the surreal or absurd.⁹⁰

Speech and the Development of Mental Processes in the Child, based on research undertaken in the early 1930s, is also based on Luria's research with twins. The book focuses on one pair of identical twins, Yura and Liosha. Luria notes that although the twins are 'good, cheerful, energetic, mischievous, friendly and affectionate', they are insufficiently advanced.⁹¹ The twins have grown up playing together and have thus developed a private language that is more simplistic or 'concrete' than that of most children their age. They have a very limited vocabulary, tend to distort words and the language they use tends to pertain to their immediate surroundings or situation. In the experiment the twins are first observed playing together, before being placed in a communal children's home where they are separated, with one receiving additional language lessons. The book traces the changes that occur in the twins' speech and behaviour as a result.

In one experiment, the separated twins are both presented with images of animals with human apparel or attributes. Luria records their responses (Child A has received extra tuition unlike Child B):

Yura (A):

'Does this happen?' 'It does' 'What is the cat doing?' 'The cat is playing'
'Can a cat really play on the violin?' 'No' 'Then does this happen?' 'No'

Liosha (B):

'Is this drawing right?' 'It is' 'Can a cat really dance like this?' 'No' 'Then is the drawing right or not?' 'Right' 'Have you seen a cat play on a balalaika?' 'No' 'Then is this drawing right or not?' 'Right' 'But can a cat play on a balaika?' etc⁹²

⁹⁰ Luria, *Speech...*, pp. 96-97.

⁹¹ Luria, *Speech...*, p. 40.

⁹² Luria, *Speech...*, p. 100.

This example is used to demonstrate the development of a ‘theoretical’ attitude. The first child is deemed more advanced than the second because he is able to identify that a cat cannot actually play a musical instrument. As with his experiments with wooden blocks, Luria is clear that imagination is valued insofar as it relates to the capacity to plan ahead, to construct and enact realistic goals for the future. A clear division between fantasy and reality needs to be instilled for the healthy development of the child. Children cannot persist in thinking that cats can really play the balalaika.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, there were conflicting ideas in the Soviet Union about the fantasy life of children. Particularly fierce debates focused on the issue of fairytales (traditional Russian folktales known as ‘*skazki*’). The mainstream Party line initially advocated an attack on children’s literature that departed from everyday life. One such ideologue proclaimed: ‘There is nothing to justify cats dressed up in hats or dogs baking pies; these fairground images add nothing positive to a child’s emotions, nor do they inculcate clear ideas about animal behaviour.’⁹³ Dorothy Thompson, who visited the Soviet Union in 1928, recalled being informed by a kindergarten teacher of a proletarian re-writing of Cinderella which saw the monarchy overthrown with the justification that “‘we do not want the energies of this coming generation dissipated by fantastic dreams about things which have no relation to our life and its problems.’”⁹⁴ Many Constructivist artists produced works aimed at children and children’s literature remained a haven for *avant garde* writers and artists into the 1930s. But though these works were illustrated with dynamic, geometric illustrations full of bright colours and off-kilter figures, the narratives tended to be grounded in everyday life (Plates 3.8 -3.9). The communal kitchens, automatic cooking appliances, zooming locomotives and slick factories that appeared in Soviet children’s literature of the NEP period may have been as fantastical as any fairy tale, but they were intended as prototypes for the future.⁹⁵ As

⁹³ MPDV 10 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1923), p. 13 cited in Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven, CN; London, 2007), p. 74.

⁹⁴ Dorothy Thompson, *The New Russia* (New York, NY; H. Holt and Co., 1928), p. 233.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Soviet avant-garde’s work for children, see Evgeny Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of early Soviet Children's Books* (Seattle; University of Washington Press, 1999), Alla Rosenfeld, ‘Does the Proletarian Child Need a Fairytale?’ *Cabinet*, 9, (2002-2003). For examples of Soviet children’s books, see: *Inside the Rainbow: Russian Children's Literature 1920-1935*, ed. by Julian Rothenstein and others (London; Redstone Press, 2013).

such, they might be aligned with the form of imaginative capacity discussed by Luria.

Luria and Vygotsky approvingly cite the influential children's author Nikolai Chukovsky in 'The Child and His Behaviour'. Chukovsky's work came under attack in the late 1920s but he eventually emerged triumphant, surviving the purges to become one of the Soviet Union's most prominent children's authors.⁹⁶ Although socialist realism was established as the dominant Soviet literary genre at the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, this, counterintuitively, coincided with the official reintroduction of traditional fairytales for children.⁹⁷ Chukovsky was to play a prominent role in the eventual denunciation of Pedology later in the decade. His *Little Children*, first published in 1928 and reissued numerous times (under the title *From Two to Five*), presents a collection of the utterances of children, characterising them as 'apt, beautiful and natural' (Plate 3.10-3.11).⁹⁸ He praises children's joyful and inquisitive minds, delighting in their malapropisms and incorrect suppositions.

Chukovsky attacks early Soviet educators for not recognising the value of teaching poetry to children, quoting from a father's letter that he says is typical of attitudes of the late 1920s:

Shame on you Comrade Chukovsky, for filling the heads of our children with all kinds of nonsense, such as that trees grow shoes. I have read with indignation in one of your books such fantastic lines as "Frogs fly up in the sky/Fish sit in the fishermen's lap/Mice catch cats/And lock them up in/Mousetraps". Why do you distort realistic facts? Children need socially useful information and not fantastic stories about white bears who cry cock-a-doodle-doo.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Chukovsky's story 'Crocodile' was denounced by Nadezhda Krupskaya in *Pravda* as a 'bourgeois muddle' on February 1 1928. On January 17 1928 Chukovsky wrote in his diary that 'anthropomorphism' was considered the greatest crime of Soviet children's literature and that he hoped to write a defence of the fairytale. Kornei Chukovsky, *Diary, 1901-1969*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press), p. 217.

⁹⁷ For a short overview of the early debates in Soviet children's literature, see: Marina Balina, 'Creativity Through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children's Literature' in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York, NY; Routledge, 2008), pp. 3-17.

⁹⁸ Kornei Chukovsky, *From Two to Five*, trans. and ed. by Miriam Morton (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1963), p. 4. This English translation is a heavily edited version of a later edition. The discussions of pedology are not included in the Russian first edition when Chukovsky himself was under attack. See, *Malen'kie Deti [Little Children]* (Leningrad; Krashaia Gazeta, 1928).

⁹⁹ Chukovsky, *From Two to Five*, pp. 89-90.

Chukovsky rails against the crushing of children's creative impulses claiming that an overzealous attachment to realism is restrictive and 'risks fading the colour out of the child's speech, making it anaemic and devitalised, killing in it its wonderful childishness and inflicting a permanent harm.'¹⁰⁰ Children, he argues, have an innate aversion to the established order of things, as such they delight in stories and games that enact a 'violation of reality': 'the child is attracted to that topsy-turvy world where legless men run, water burns, horses gallop astride their riders, and cows nibble on peas on the top of birch trees.'¹⁰¹ Unlike Luria, who maintains that young children confuse reality and fantasy, Chukovsky insists that children are well aware of the distinction between the two: a child does not eat the sand pie that it bakes on the beach.¹⁰²

Chukovsky's diatribes against people intent on sapping the 'creative genius of the people'¹⁰³ were explicitly aimed at pedologists who he accused of making a 'banal fetish' of practicality.¹⁰⁴ He recounts that in 1929 he visited a children's home where a fairytale book was snatched from him by a man in uniform:

the pedologists are worried and tremble at the thought that children will actually believe that shoes grow on trees. Some children are so suspicious of everything – even the most poetic, that is, the most unreal – that everything beyond the limits of the everyday and the ordinary they consider a bold-faced and senseless fabrication.¹⁰⁵

For Chukovsky, however, an inversion of reality always existed as a counterpart to reality itself, presenting an image of the world turned upside down therefore serves to enforce the child's orientation to the existing state of things. Ultimately, Chukovsky and the pedologists he attacked shared assumptions about childhood perception and learning processes. Both Chukovsky and Luria were primarily

¹⁰⁰ Chukovsky, *From Two to Five*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰¹ Chukovsky, *From Two to Five*, p. 95, p. 96.

¹⁰² Chukovsky's assumption is challenged by R.G. Vilenkina's pedological experiments. She asked adolescent workers and apprentices to deposit anonymous notes in a designated box. One asks – 'Do people live on Mars?' suggesting that Soviet fantasies were indeed mistaken for reality by some contemporary citizens. See, R. G. Vilenkina, 'K kharakteristike nasroenii Rabochego podrostka' ['On the Characteristic Mental Features of the Adolescent Worker'], *Pedologiya*, 1 (1930), 81-97, p. 88.

¹⁰³ Chukovsky, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ Chukovsky, p. 125.

¹⁰⁵ Chukovsky, pp. 124-125.

concerned with teaching the child to orient itself to the established structures of the world.¹⁰⁶

Benjamin, again, provides an alternative vision. Benjamin and Luria both presented childhood perception as an undifferentiated, swarming mess of colour. It was their evaluation of this mode of perception that differed. Luria's work was addressed to a description of how 'discrete, defined structures begin to crystallise out of the chaos of different shades and hues.'¹⁰⁷ His work was not descriptive but prescriptive, as he intended to discover how this crystallisation process might be facilitated through education. Benjamin, on the other hand, celebrated the child's 'colour-bedecked world where everything shifts at every step'.¹⁰⁸ He argued that picture books should not induct children into an ordered world of things but should rather enable the child to imbue objects with a 'dreamy life' of their own.¹⁰⁹

These differences are evident in Luria's and Benjamin's observations of their own children's development. Luria, like Piaget who famously observed his three children, made notes on his daughter Elena's physical development, affective responses and perceptions of colour and sound.¹¹⁰ His observations about her linguistic development emphasise the relation between speech and the gratification of need (for example, he notes that she initially communicated in imperatives indicating basic wants). He also gives examples of infantile misunderstanding, relating an occasion when she mistakenly called a puddle a 'shame' as this was what her nurse always exclaimed when the child wet herself. Luria describes this as a 'comical event' but, like Chukovsky, interprets the incident as a mistake to be corrected.¹¹¹ Benjamin also documented his son Stefan's language usage, collecting his childish aphorisms and idiosyncratic formulations in a special notebook. In her introduction to a translation of the surviving fragments of this collection, Esther

¹⁰⁶ A similar observation about the similarities between Chukovsky's approach and the approach of pedologists he aims to distinguish himself from is made in Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ Luria, 'Experimental Psychology and Child Development' in *Selected Writings of Alexander Luria*, pp. 78-96, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin, 'A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books', *Selected Writings, vol. 1*, pp. 435-443, p. 435.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, 'Old Forgotten Children's Books', *Selected Writings, vol. 1*, pp. 406-413, p. 410.

¹¹⁰ Sections from Luria's notebooks on his daughter's development are included in Elena Luria, *Moi Otets*, pp. 92-99.

Leslie differentiates Benjamin's observations from the more systemic descriptions of Piaget (who in this respect was much closer to Luria), noting that his project was

not directed toward a documentation of the acquisition of language, but rather toward specific aspects of infantile thinking and speaking – the detours in which it goes astray [...] For him, linguistic blunders and misunderstandings do not find their meaning in being corrected.¹¹²

Stefan's associations and correspondences crack open the world to reveal relations between things obscured by adults' more habitual perceptions.

In Luria's work, in contrast, language acquisition has an organising function. The pre-linguistic child 'does not yet possess correct and adequate ideas about a whole order of things.'¹¹³ Through naming the child begins to differentiate objects, classify entities in accordance with established systems and communicate in a more sophisticated manner: 'The child becomes aware that a particular object may play a different role in different situations; and his perception, refracted through this prism, acquires a more dynamic nature.'¹¹⁴ For Luria this enables the child's thinking to become 'more vital and practical'.¹¹⁵ 'Dynamism' for Luria is always related to mastery of existing structures, rather than their subversion. Benjamin suggests that even as the child masters language its inventive mode of perception continues. Habit retains a shattered quality here too. He perceives a parallel between the child repurposing objects in play and the reading child:

The fairy tale is [...] a waste product [...] Children are able to manipulate [them] with the same ease and lack of inhibition that they display in playing with pieces of cloth or building blocks. They build their world out of motifs from the fairy tale, combining its various elements.¹¹⁶

The reading child is 'less systematic, more whimsical and boistrous' than the reading adult.¹¹⁷ Words imbue the world with wonder and provide new ways of experimenting:

Draped with colours of every hue that he has picked up from reading and observing, the child stands in the centre of a masquerade and joins in, while

¹¹¹ Elena Luria, *Moi Otets*, p. 96.

¹¹² Esther Leslie, 'Opinions et Pensées: His Son's Words and Turns of Phrase' in *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs* (London; Verso, 2007), pp. 109-112. For sections of the notebook, see: pp. 116-150.

¹¹³ Luria, 'Paths...' p. 124.

¹¹⁴ Luria, 'Paths...' p. 137.

¹¹⁵ Luria, 'Paths...' p. 142.

¹¹⁶ Benjamin, 'Old Forgotten Children's Books', p. 408.

¹¹⁷ Benjamin, 'A Glimpse...', p. 436.

reading – for the words have all come to the masked ball, are joining in the fun and are whirling around together like tinkling snowflakes. ‘Prince’ is a word with a star tied to it’, said a boy of seven. When children think up stories, they are like theatre-producers who refuse to be bound by ‘sense’. This is easily proved. If you give children four or five specific words and ask them to make a short sentence on the spot the most amazing prose comes to light [...] At a stroke the words throw on their costumes and in the twinkling of an eye they are caught up in a battle, love scenes or a brawl.¹¹⁸

For Luria, the ideal child is an architect or engineer constructing an orderly world according to existing blueprints, whereas for Benjamin the child is a theatrical artist creating bright new forms from the wreckage of the old, forms that might also detonate the existing structures of the adult world.¹¹⁹

These conflicting accounts of childhood also reveal distinct understandings of revolution and historical change. For Luria, the October Revolution figures as a momentous event after which history was set on its course towards the bright communist future. This aligns with his discussions of childhood which, despite identifying moments of crisis that punctuate the ascent to maturity, is always oriented towards a particular future. As in his criticisms of psychoanalysis, development might be uneven but it is nonetheless organised along a timeline of successive stages which transform previous structures at every step; the old does not persist in the new. For Benjamin, on the other hand, the relationship of past to present to future is characterised by eruptive interpenetrations of then and now. Benjamin not only affirms the unique perspective of the child, but suggests that the revolutionary subject is forged through the shattering confrontation of child with adult and of childishness with maturity. Mapped onto history, Benjamin’s model allows for an understanding of political transformation as an on-going process that requires constant renewal; he suggests that children interrupt everyday routines in a manner analogous to the proletariat’s role in history. This understanding of both individuals and history challenges the progressive model that informs Luria’s work, which affirms the current unfolding of history. This difference in perspective is magnified in their respective views on pedagogy. The process of how and from

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, ‘A Glimpse...’ p. 435. The seven year old boy quoted here is his son Stefan, see *Walter Benjamin’s Archive*, p. 142.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin explicitly describes the child as an artist, unbound by the laws of adult perception, in ‘A Child’s View of Colour’ (1914-1915), *Selected Writings, vol.1*, pp. 50-51.

whom children learn was a critical yet fraught question in the post-revolutionary context. Luria assumed that children (like the proletariat) must be guided by an existing tutelary body of some sort, whereas Benjamin insisted that education was not a one way street.

Paradoxes of the Vanguard

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Jacques Rancière addresses the contradictory relationship of adult to child. Drawing on the example of a pedagogical experiment undertaken in the aftermath of the French Revolution, he asserts the possibility of learning between equals. Rancière describes learning as a tussle between stultification and emancipation, the stultified and the emancipated. For Rancière, assuming the inferiority of any other person will result in stultification, instead emancipatory learning must proceed from the assumption that ‘everyone is of equal intelligence.’¹²⁰ Equality is understood as a practice in the present rather than a concept to be realised in the future. Rancière dispenses with a hierarchical relation that assumes a pairing of ignorance to knowledge. All people are assumed to have an equal capacity to learn, which, for Rancière, trumps the disparities between what different people happen to know. The relation between stultification and emancipation he describes might be aligned with the confrontation of reproduction with revolution, habit with shattering, routine with rupture traced in this chapter. Rancière is primarily concerned with how to address the asymmetrical power relationship between student and teacher. The pedagogical parity he describes was crucially, he insists, antithetical to Enlightened notions of progress: ‘Equality was not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a supposition to maintain in every circumstance.’¹²¹ Liberation cannot be founded on oppression.

Benjamin reflects on the relationship between adult and child in his 1929 essay ‘Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre’. Here, in an argument indebted to Asja Lacis’s work in Soviet children’s theatre and informed by his experiences in Moscow, he argues that participating in theatrical performance is integral to

¹²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 101.

¹²¹ Rancière, p. 138.

communist pedagogy. He is quick to condemn forms of instruction that replicate the strict and stultifying methods used in capitalist education which impose a particular world-view on the child:

The proletariat must not pass on its own class interest to the next generation with the tainted methods of an ideology that is destined to subjugate the child's suggestible mind. The discipline the bourgeoisie demands from children is its mark of shame.¹²²

Benjamin, like Rancière, perceives that an emancipated society cannot be based on relations that assume the domination of one group of people over another. Though adults instruct children, for Benjamin, a communist learning process necessarily flows in two directions:

in a performance children stand on the stage and instruct and teach attentive educators. New forces, new innervations appear - ones that the educator had no inkling of while working on the project. He learns about them only in the course of this wild liberation of the child's imagination.¹²³

Openly attending to children provides adults with important political insights: 'What is truly revolutionary is the secret signal of what is to come that speaks from the gesture of the child.'¹²⁴

The tension between stultification and emancipation is played out in Luria and Vygotsky's writings on childhood. They did not share the ideas expressed by some of their more radical contemporaries that adults should follow the lead of their more authentically communist progeny. For Aron Zalkind, for example, children would ideally form miniature cadres of dedicated revolutionaries untarnished by the former 'stagnant way of life', setting an example to the older generation rather than meekly following its authoritarian lead: 'children - enthusiasts, activists, gripped by collective feeling, carry into musty family life new principles of revolutionary ideology [...] a future is being formed in its embryonic elements through the children's efforts.'¹²⁵ Adults were more central to Luria and Vygotsky's accounts of childhood, playing a key role in introducing children to the social world, a world of

¹²² Benjamin, 'Programme for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' (1929), *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 205.

¹²³ Benjamin, 'Programme...', p. 205.

¹²⁴ Benjamin, 'Programme...', p. 206.

¹²⁵ Aron Zalkind, 'The Pioneer Youth Movement as a form of Cultural Work among the Proletariat' in *Bolshevik Visions: The First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed. by William G.

words and objects organised in particular ways. In their experiments, they traced how children gradually learn to appeal to adults for assistance: ‘the road from object to child and from child to object lies through another person.’¹²⁶

Vygotsky’s ‘Play and its Role in the Mental Development of the Child’ suggests that in play the child operates according to rules of his or her own devising, rather than relying on the external rules imposed by parents or guardians. Children become conscious directors of their own activities. In ‘Tool and Symbol in Child Development’ (c. 1930),¹²⁷ Luria and Vygotsky similarly analyse how the child learns to master its environment through the use of speech, a capacity which, they argue (recalling their critique of Gestalt psychology discussed in Chapter 2), qualitatively separates children from apes. With the aid of speech, eventually internalised as thought, the child can plan and organise its activities. Narrating action is not a passive activity but plays an active role in the performance of practical tasks. Symbolic activity and practical activity form a ‘complex unity’ in the human.¹²⁸ For Luria and Vygotsky, the emergence of this ‘newly born unit of perception’ marks the beginning of human life proper; the beginning of a mode of cognition that is fundamentally distinct from the animal:

At the moment when, thanks to the planning assistance of speech, a view of the future is included as an active agent, the child’s whole operational psychological field changes radically and its behaviour is fundamentally reconstructed.¹²⁹

Through speech, the child masters both itself and its environment. Planning and intentionality are necessary to comprehend reality as more than ‘splintered and peculiar’¹³⁰ sensations or as a ‘hodgepodge of disrupted and disorganised’

Rosenburg (Ann Arbor; Ardis, 1984), pp. 347-354, p. 351. First published in Russian in *Vestnik truda*, No 3 (40), 1924, 107-116.

¹²⁶ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Tool and Symbol in Child Development’ in René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner eds. *The Vygotsky Reader* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 99-174, p. 116.

¹²⁷ Although Vygotsky lists this essay in the bibliography of *Myslenie i rech (Thinking and Speech)* in 1934, this text was not published in Russian until 1984. On the text’s history see *Vygotsky Reader*, p. 170. An exhaustive comparison of the English and Russian versions is provided in D. Kellogg and A. Yasnitsky, ‘The differences between the Russian and English texts of Tool and Symbol in Child Development - Supplementary and analytic materials’, *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 4, 4 (2011), 98-158.

¹²⁸ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Tool..’, p. 113.

¹²⁹ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Tool...’, p. 122.

¹³⁰ Luria and Vygotsky, ‘Tool...’, p. 125.

perceptions.¹³¹ Language is necessary for the child to meaningfully manipulate objects. Vygotsky argued that in play

a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself [...] in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour.¹³²

For Vygotsky, the child takes on the position of its own educator. In the prescribed imaginary space of the game, the child learns to apply the order inherent to the existing adult world. Rules are central to Vygotsky's account of play, which paves the road to working life: play 'permeates the attitude toward reality. It has its own inner continuation in school instruction and work (compulsory activity based on rules)'.¹³³ Through play the child learns to derive pleasure from the performance of unpleasurable activities, internalising the 'higher' structures of thought of the adult. Although adults do not directly guide the child here, their ethereal internalised presence is indispensable. The function of play remains assimilative and is premised on a progressive understanding of development understood as a process of ascent towards adulthood.

The period during which the child learns to play is preceded by a period of total dependence on the adult: 'Definitely everything in the behaviour of the infant is intertwined and interwoven into the sociable.'¹³⁴ In Luria and Vygotsky's accounts, adults, who children initially mistake for objects, appear as the custodians of reality. A child's relation to reality is 'always refracted through a prism of relations with another person.'¹³⁵ Adults are responsible for introducing children to language and social existence. In the intellectual biography *Understanding Vygotsky*, René Van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner summarise the relation of child to adult in Vygotsky's work in the following terms without, however, reflecting on the political implications of his position:

Children should not be left to themselves when acquiring new knowledge and wisdom, as this was equivalent to not educating them at all, leaving their development to the obnoxious forces of the 'street'. Bringing up children necessarily means restricting their freedom of action, Vygotsky reasoned,

¹³¹ Vygotsky and Luria, 'Tool...', p. 112. Here they are comparing the child to the aphasic person who, they argue, is similarly incapable of coherently uniting their perceptions.

¹³² Vygotsky, 'Play', pp. 95-96.

¹³³ Vygotsky, 'Play', p. 98.

¹³⁴ Vygotsky, 'Infancy', *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky, Vol. 5*, pp. 207-241, p. 215.

¹³⁵ Vygotsky, 'Infancy', p. 216.

sometimes in the interest of the child himself, sometimes in the interest of the collective. The role of parents and teachers is and should be enormous: in forming part of the children's environment and organising this environment they will steer the child's mental development to a considerable extent.¹³⁶

Similarly, in Luria's experiments with twins discussed above, adult educators play a key role in directing activities. The children who emerged as the most 'advanced' were the ones who received most instruction from educated adults.

Ella Winter, a sympathetic visitor to the Soviet Union in 1933, declared: 'The child has been freed from exploitation, as women, workers, peasants, national minorities have been freed.'¹³⁷ But freed by whom? Just as with Luria's experiments with national minorities (many of whom were also women, workers or peasants), children were not assumed to be of equal intelligence to educated adults. Luria's work imagined educated adults as constituting the fabric of the present into which children (and other less 'advanced' groups) were gradually stitched. As in Luria's experiments in Central Asia, this approach distributes people who share a single historical moment along a trajectory of development which implies some inhabitants of the present really belong to the past. Vygotsky's description of play as an 'illusory freedom' might be applied here.¹³⁸ Unlike Rancière's and Benjamin's theories of education, this model of revolutionary upbringing fails to eliminate the unequal relationship between child and adult; it seeks to found liberation on oppression.

Although Luria and Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of instruction was not unique to their Soviet context, a distinctly Soviet model for understanding political development implicitly ungirded their approach to education and development. In *What is to be Done?* (1901-2), Lenin addressed the problem of developing revolutionary class consciousness in the proletariat, concluding that 'class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*.'¹³⁹ Lenin's model of political mobilisation relies on a revolutionary vanguard: 'a strong organisation of revolutionaries to train the proletariat in steadfast and stubborn

¹³⁶ René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1991) p. 53

¹³⁷ Winter, p. 217.

¹³⁸ Vygotsky, 'Play...' p. 98.

¹³⁹ V.I. Lenin, 'What is to be Done?' *Collected Works, vol. 5*, trans. by Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp. 347-529, p. 422.

struggle.¹⁴⁰ For Lenin, social revolution was coupled to a programme of cultural enlightenment. Lisa Kirschenbaum argues in the context of Soviet policies focused on children that ‘discipline and education (or control and indoctrination) had long existed as revolutionary goals.’¹⁴¹ Luria and Vygotsky’s discussion of teaching similarly requires training, organisation and discipline imposed from without. Here adult educators take on the role of the revolutionary vanguard in relation to the spontaneous masses of children.

In a 1920 essay Lenin famously described left-wing communism as an ‘infantile disorder’. The Russian term - ‘*detskaia bolezn*’ - might more accurately be translated as ‘childhood ailment’, implying that Lenin intended to refer to the physical development of the child rather than its psychic disposition; to the painful but necessary and ultimately immunising illnesses experienced during infancy.¹⁴² In *What is to be Done?* he deploys a similar metaphor, referring to the ‘growing pains’ experienced in political struggle;¹⁴³ he aligns the organic development of the individual with the historical journey towards revolution. In describing the relationship between spontaneity [*stikhinost*] and consciousness [*soznatel'nost*] in *What is to be Done?* Lenin uses another organic metaphor that maps political development onto the development of life: ‘the “spontaneous element”, in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an *embryonic form*.’¹⁴⁴ He goes on to describe how a spontaneous act like a strike acts as a ‘flash’ of consciousness, and he is concerned with how to convert a sudden and dramatic burst of light into a steady blaze. Luria’s understanding of childhood development was structured in a similar manner to Lenin’s discussions of political maturation. Indeed, Vygotsky, as we have seen, used the same metaphor as Lenin in reverse - likening human development to revolution. For Luria, the life of the individual is imagined as

¹⁴⁰ Lenin, ‘What is to be Done?’, p. 445.

¹⁴¹ Kirschenbaum, p. 162. David F. Hoffman’s discussion of the Soviet state’s obsession with hygiene, cleanliness, efficiency and sobriety in *Stalinist Values* is also relevant here. He usefully highlights the ambivalence of these policies which simultaneously demonstrate benevolent impulses to create a more beautiful life, the practical necessities involved in maintaining a healthy labour force alongside the more straightforwardly totalitarian motivations that demanded the creation of a docile and pliant population.

¹⁴² Lenin, ‘Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder’, *Collected Works, Vol. 31* trans. by Julius Katzer (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1966) pp. 17-118.

¹⁴³ Lenin, ‘What is to be Done?’, p. 444.

¹⁴⁴ V.I. Lenin, ‘What is to be Done?’, p. 374. He later switches from an ontogenetic to a phylogenetic metaphor when discussing the ‘primitiveness’ of Social Democratic political activity, pp. 441-451.

a transition from the spontaneity of childhood to the consciousness of adulthood. Luria studied incipient forms in order to understand ‘higher’ ones.

The literate adult was the pinnacle of development in Luria and Vygotsky’s account of human development. Their work on ‘primitive’ people and children were similarly addressed to explaining the emergence of a more ‘advanced’ mode of thinking. For Luria and Vygotsky, in contrast to Benjamin, children were primarily interesting because they eventually became adults. Childhood was characterised as a process of overcoming chaos and establishing order with the older generation responsible for inculcating that order. The analogy with Lenin’s conception of the revolutionary vanguard is tellingly imprecise: thrown into this post-revolutionary context a broadly Leninist understanding of the progressive development towards consciousness paradoxically becomes a theory that aims to consolidate rather than overthrow the existing social order. Analogies between the ontogenetic and phylogenetic founder on the other side of the revolutionary event where the spontaneous acts of resistance that precede revolution are supposedly in the past, even if full-blown revolutionary consciousness and a fully communist society still lie some way ahead. As with Luria’s research in Uzbekistan, the conclusions of his research with children operate according to a confusingly circular logic: revolution involves breaking with the established order but once the revolution has occurred advanced consciousness is achieved through the top-down instillation of a set of predetermined norms. Children no longer represent a new beginning, the possibility of doing things differently, but necessarily rely on an existing tutelary body of some sort to induct them into communist society.

Benjamin, in contrast to Lenin and Luria, was primarily interested in flashes. Susan Buck-Morss’s distinction between avant-garde and vanguard temporalities (already discussed in Chapter 2) is relevant here. Luria’s acceptance of the vanguardist model implies an ‘acceptance of the party’s monopolistic right to control the direction of social transformation’, whereas Benjamin advocated an understanding of learning closer to the *avant garde* which hoped to ‘inspire

imagination in a way that set reality into question'.¹⁴⁵ Unlike Lenin who emphasised the importance of establishing 'stability and continuity' in a revolutionary situation,¹⁴⁶ Benjamin is not concerned with how a spontaneous flash might prefigure or portend something durational and organised (and hence more meaningful). He is interested in flashes in their own rights, however momentary or fleeting. On the streets of Moscow he witnessed 'time catastrophes, time collisions,'¹⁴⁷ and his own work was similarly concerned with interpenetrations, interruptions and eruptions. His writing on childhood informs and overlaps with his conception of history. In both cases, Benjamin is suspicious of progressive narratives. Benjamin's theorisations of the child therefore open up the possibility for challenging the emerging Soviet *status quo* Luria's work defended and for apprehending the ways in which history failed to conform to the progressive narratives upon which Luria's research relied. Instead, Benjamin affirms the continual collision of the past with the present, the child with the adult, suggesting that coexisting modes of perception continually interrogate the extant.

In 'Doctrine of the Similar' (1933), Benjamin reflects that children demonstrate a mimetic faculty that he imagines parallels the perceptions of the earliest forms of human society: 'Children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behaviour.'¹⁴⁸ He declares that in primitive times people imitated the sky and this form of 'cosmic being' is replicated in the newborn baby.¹⁴⁹ For Benjamin this moment of mimesis is fleeting because birth is a singular event. As such, the capacity to reproduce is instantaneous rather than durational. This fact by no means detracts from its significance, however. He writes:

The perception of similarity is in every case bound to a flashing up. It flits past, can possibly be won again, but cannot really be held fast as can other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2000), p. 62.

¹⁴⁶ Lenin, 'What is to be Done?', p. 446.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin, 'Doctrine of the Similar', *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 694-698, p. 694.

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin, 'Doctrine', p. 695.

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin, 'Doctrine', pp. 695-696.

Mimesis, though concerned with reproduction, is imagined as a shattering rather than a habitual experience. Again, routine collides with rupture. The child here also emerges as a prototype for the historical materialist described in Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940). In a passage that strikingly recalls his discussion of mimesis he writes there: 'The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again.'¹⁵¹ For Benjamin, contra Lenin and Luria, spontaneity is not the precursor to genuinely revolutionary thought or action, whose meaning is only realised if it transforms into consciousness. Instead, he affirms the 'moment of danger', the unique experience which 'briefly flashes up'.¹⁵² In his definition of dialectical thinking spontaneity and consciousness continually collide; the spontaneous flash is necessary to blast open the 'continuum of history', to which Luria's work still clung.¹⁵³

In Benjamin's work, children continually surprise and challenge adults, even as adults teach and care for children. This is what he claimed differentiated bourgeois and proletarian education: 'The children of the bourgeoisie confront it as its heirs; to the disinherited, they are helpers, avengers, liberators.'¹⁵⁴ That is not to say that the child's forms of perception should be maintained or romanticised, but that the processes of interaction, education and recognition flow in two directions¹⁵⁵: 'Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children?'¹⁵⁶ Luria's account of childhood occluded a consideration of how adults' encounters with children might act to unsettle or interrupt existing perceptions of the world and thus repeated this bourgeois model. Children may have been depicted as being initiated into a liberated society, but they were themselves

¹⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389-400, p. 390.

¹⁵² Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 391.

¹⁵³ Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 395.

¹⁵⁴ Benjamin, 'A Communist Pedagogy', *Selected Writings, vol. 2*, pp. 273-275, p. 273.

¹⁵⁵ My argument here is inspired by Lisa Baraitser's work on maternal subjectivity, on the interruptive experience of being alongside children and the attempt to think 'what it is like to be in close proximity to the 'open structure' that is a child'. See, Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (New York, NY; Routledge, 2009), p. 26. I have also drawn inspiration from Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 1995).

imagined as heirs rather than liberators. Just as his understanding of historical development insisted on the supersession of the past at every stage of development and therefore struggled to account for ‘regressive’ experiences, Luria’s understanding of childhood sat uncomfortably alongside his professed interest in the social and historical milieu in which the people he analysed lived.

Crucially, Luria and the children he was analysing did not live in a liberated society. Benjamin’s work suggests that the continuous interaction of children and adults troubles progressive visions of the ascent of humanity towards consciousness. Even if Luria rejected this understanding of children as potentially subversive, he still encountered individuals who deviated from the ordained path to maturity. The chaotic social conditions of Soviet life proved difficult for Luria and his collaborators to navigate. How could orderly minds be forged in the midst of such concrete devastation? And, more importantly, how could the continued existence of social and psychological disorder be made to fit with their progressive frameworks?

Children of the Revolution

In ‘Old Forgotten Children’s Books’ (1924), Benjamin outlined an understanding of childhood associated with the Enlightenment: ‘if man was pious, good, and sociable by nature, it had to be possible to transform children, who were creatures of nature in its purest form, into the most pious, the best, and the most sociable beings of all.’¹⁵⁷ In her discussion of children’s fiction, Jacqueline Rose similarly identifies a ‘fetish of childhood’ in Western European literature, which conceives of the early years of life as a period of lost innocence and unity.¹⁵⁸ In Enlightenment thinking, according to Rose, the child is likened to the ‘primitive’: ‘They are connected by a fantasy of origins – the belief that each one represents an ultimate beginning where everything is perfect or can at least be made good.’¹⁵⁹ The child thus functions as a ‘pure point of origin.’¹⁶⁰ In Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s seminal *Émile* (1762), Rousseau declared human existence a degradation, disfiguration and deformation of the integral and

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin, ‘One Way Street’, p. 487.

¹⁵⁷ Benjamin, ‘Old Forgotten Children’s Books’, pp.406-413, p. 407.

¹⁵⁸ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Literature* (Philadelphia, PA; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Rose, *Peter Pan*, p. 138.

harmonious nature created by God. Though returning to this whole and unmutated beginning is impossible, Rousseau outlines an educational programme that attempts to adhere as closely as possible to the natural course: 'Observe nature and follow the path it maps out for you.'¹⁶¹

Luria explicitly linked the child and the primitive, individual and cultural development. He had no interest in glorifying a period of imagined lost innocence, however. In his work with both children and Central Asian peasants, he was intent on tracing a progression from 'lower' to 'higher' modes of thought:

Each subsequent stage supersedes and supplants the previous one; only after he has gone through the stages of inventing his own devices and has learned the cultural systems evolved over the centuries does a child arrive at a stage of development that is characteristic of advanced, civilized man.¹⁶²

This transition to the historical is imagined as an emancipatory journey away from nature. Once the human ascends to a new level, 'he loses or discards all the earlier, more primitive forms [...] each subsequent stage supersedes and supplants the previous one.'¹⁶³ Modern technology, social institutions and collective ways of living all contribute to creating a more advanced human being, capable of intervening in the world. Capitalism deforms humans; under communism humans would consciously form and re-form themselves, each other and the material world.

After the revolution, dominant representations of childhood as a lost idyll were displaced by narratives of hardship and endurance. Leon Trotsky's *My Life* opens with a caustic attack on bourgeois understandings of childhood:

Childhood is looked upon as the happiest time of life. Is that always true? No, only a few have a happy childhood. The idealisation of childhood originated in the old literature of the privileged. A secure, affluent, and unclouded childhood, spent in a home of inherited wealth and culture, a childhood of affection and play, brings back to one memories of a sunny meadow at the beginning of the road of life. The grandees of literature, or the plebeians who glorify the grandees, have canonised this purely aristocratic view of childhood. But the majority of the people, if it looks back at all, sees,

¹⁶⁰ Rose, *Peter Pan*, p. 8.

¹⁶¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or On Education*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York, NY; Basic Books, 1979), p. 47.

¹⁶² Luria, 'Paths...', p. 95.

¹⁶³ Luria, 'Experimental Psychology and Child Development' in *Selected Writings of Alexander Luria*, pp. 78-96, pp. 94-95.

on the contrary, a childhood of darkness, hunger and dependence. Life strikes the weak – and who is weaker than a child?¹⁶⁴

Maxim Gorky's *My Childhood* (1913), set in the years immediately preceding the revolution, is a tale of torment and perseverance that became the archetypal narrative of the early years of life in the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and 1930s it became the dominant model for Soviet narratives of childhood, read and re-read across the country.¹⁶⁵ The story opens with the child confronting his father's death. Little Gorky peers into his father's grave and watches in horror and confusion as some little frogs hopping about on the coffin are suffocated beneath the soil. Set in a dull quagmire of murkiness, mist and mud, Gorky describes his childhood as a period of fear, anxiety and suffering: a 'dreary life [...] full of violence,' a 'close-knit, suffocating little world of pain and suffering.'¹⁶⁶ Gorky's depiction of his early life represented a stark break with the traditions of Russian literature epitomised by Lev Tolstoy's *Childhood*, which conformed to the Rousseauian model, portraying childhood, through a misty haze of nostalgia and sentimentality, as a period of purity, virtue and harmony with nature.¹⁶⁷

According to Denise Riley: 'The figure of the child remains an archetype of a biological-to-social knot [...] as the exemplar of pure nature, pure biology, capable of arriving at full humanity only through successive forays into a world it stands outside.'¹⁶⁸ Riley contrasts the 'unmuddied' child which development psychology treats as a 'pure object of study' with the 'denser, harder, impenetrably complex' adult 'hopelessly riddled with the world's determinations.'¹⁶⁹ Although Luria does discuss the new born infant as a universal figure situated at the beginning of human life, he does not exalt this natural starting point. Furthermore, the period of natural passivity he describes is short-lived. The world soon intervenes. Despite Luria's insistence that the external, cultural world would ideally have a positive organising impact on the development of the child, he was forced to contend with a chaotic society. Soviet children were not pure and unmuddied but already dirtied by their

¹⁶⁴ Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (Middlesex; Penguin, 1970), p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ See, Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 149-150

¹⁶⁶ Maxim Gorky, *My Childhood*, trans. by Ronald Wilks (Penguin; London, 1966), p. 25.

¹⁶⁷ See, Baruch Wachtel, pp. 131-152.

¹⁶⁸ Riley, p. 27, p. 33.

¹⁶⁹ Riley, p. 26.

experiences. The interventions of the Soviet cultural world did not correspond to the pedagogical methods and tools implemented in the controlled environments of Luria's laboratories. Luria and his team of researchers confronted this when they ventured on to the streets of Moscow to interview vagrant children.

Abandoned children (*besprizornye* or *besprizorniki*) were a prominent feature of Soviet urban life. The bourgeois nuclear family was being challenged for ideological reasons but many children were separated from their parents by historical circumstances. Bands of urchins roamed the country often resorting to begging, stealing and prostitution to survive. Although homeless children existed in Russia prior to the October Revolution, in the wake of the violence, famine and epidemics that accompanied the First World War and the Civil War their numbers greatly increased. By 1922 the Bolshevik government was forced to contend with at least seven million *besprizornye* on the streets of Soviet cities. Initially, Soviet authorities blamed the phenomenon on the tumultuous Civil War years, framing abandonment as a problem of the past. Networks of children's homes were initially planned to provide child rearing facilities for working parents but in the face of mass homelessness these tended to function as shelters (Plate 3.12). The number of children living on the streets diminished in the 1920s but as the decade continued it became evident that abandonment persisted, forcing the state to address a far more uncomfortable reality: *besprizornye* were also a phenomenon of the present.¹⁷⁰

Benjamin described the *besprizornye* as 'derelict, unspeakably melancholy [...] thoroughly savage, mistrustful, embittered people.'¹⁷¹ By the early 1930s, the continued existence of vast numbers of homeless youths, many driven to the cities in the wake of collectivisation, had become an embarrassment to the Soviet government who began to deny their existence.¹⁷² Observers unsympathetic to the Soviet cause pointed to these children as embodied evidence of the revolution's failings. In 1931 the former Socialist Revolutionary Party member Vladimir

¹⁷⁰ On abandoned children in the Soviet Union, see Alan Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1994) and Juliane Fürst, 'Between Salvation and Liquidation: Homeless and Vagrant Children and the Reconstruction of Soviet Society', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 86, 2 (2008), 231-258.

¹⁷¹ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 27.

Zenzinov clearly read the *besprizornye* as products of history and therefore a damning indictment of Stalin's regime:

Covered with dust and dirt, with soot and oil, mud and petrol [...] clothed in rags [...] thrown up by the waves of misery and social disorder which have washed them into the towns and villages and railways – The deserted children! The deserted children!¹⁷³

The glittering, regimented army of dedicated pioneers that marched across Soviet propaganda was haunted by this hungry, foul-smelling horde of young people.

The contradictions of revolutionary childhood are magnified in the figure of the abandoned child. Immediately following the revolution, political idealists had proposed to transform this swathe of children into the new revolutionary generation, accustomed to simple, communal living and untarnished by family life. Zalkind proclaimed confidently that these children were 'closer to the collective comradely ethic than the 'normal' morality of self-love that children from a bourgeois environment have.'¹⁷⁴ But in practice educational institutions focused on rehabilitation and re-education, which proved difficult. Many of those who found their way into the oversubscribed state run institutions were deeply traumatised by their street lives, others simply ran away. These young people had grown up isolated from social norms: they swore, they smoked, they refused to sit still and they often spoke in a street argot that was incomprehensible to outsiders. Like the 'ichkari' women discussed in the previous chapter, these children occupied a liminal social position. This initially marked them out as potential allies in the revolutionary struggle who posed a threat to the structures of the past, but they soon figured as a threat to the orderly new social structures being erected in the present.

Langston Hughes, who visited the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, remarked upon the contradictory qualities of the 'pitiful and half-savage children of upheaval' many of whom resisted the state's attempts to place them on the 'path to progress', preferring their 'precarious freedom' of exciting peregrinations, mischief and petty crime, to the relative 'comfort and regularity' provided by state institutions,

¹⁷² Ball, *And Now...*, pp. 193-195.

¹⁷³ Vladimir Zenzinov, *Deserted: The Story of the Children Abandoned in Soviet Russia* (London; H Joseph, 1931), p. 129.

declaring: ‘These determined little hooligans were making a last stand for freedom’. In Hughes’ account the ‘wandering delinquents’ are presented as cheeky, inventive and charming; a positive reminder of the persistence of irregularity and spontaneity in the increasingly orderly communist nation.¹⁷⁵ Hughes perceived that the children represented a potential challenge to the already stultifying social order. But this was not the line taken by the Party elite. On the eighth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1925 Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin had declared it necessary to ‘save’ the *besprizornye*: ‘The situation here threatens grave dangers for the future if we are not able to eradicate promptly in youths the bad habits that a vagrant life imparts to them.’¹⁷⁶ The *besprizornye* threatened to shatter the ‘good habits’ espoused by the nascent communist state.

Besprizornye often lived on rubbish dumps or coal heaps. Many survived on scraps of discarded food. Alan M. Ball vividly describes homeless children nibbling at fish heads, chewing on watermelon rinds or licking crumbs from plates. They were likened to flocks of sparrows, ravenous locusts or parasites.¹⁷⁷ Konstantin Paustovsky described encountering a group of street children in dirty, over-sized jackets in whose pockets they kept all of their belongings – ‘bits of broken combs, knives, cigarettes, crusts of bread, matches, greasy cards and bits of dirty bandages’ – and beneath which could be glimpsed their ‘frozen, dirty, greenish-yellow bodies, covered with bleeding streaks’.¹⁷⁸ These external attributes were taken to reflect the children’s messy and unsavoury inner lives. These filthy children were not pristine new babies, lumps of clay ready to be moulded. They were not raw material but had already been battered by the ravages of experience. Soviet children’s institutions were initially imagined as the forges of the new nation but this was closer to a salvage operation.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Zalkind, ‘Psikhopatyi li besprizornye?’ *Vestnik prosveshcheniia*, 9 (1924), p. 136 cited in Gorsuch, p. 160.

¹⁷⁵ Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: an Autobiographical Journey* (New York, NY; Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1986), pp. 153-154.

¹⁷⁶ *Pravda*, 1925, no. 255 (November 7), p. 2, cited in Ball, *And Now...* p. 193.

¹⁷⁷ Ball, *And Now...* p. 45.

¹⁷⁸ Konstantin Paustovsky, *The Restless Years* (London; Harvill, 1974), p. 46.

¹⁷⁹ For an explicit discussion of how metaphors of moulding, forging and building were applied to the *besprizornye*, see: Marina Balina, ‘‘It’s Grand to be an Orphan!’’: Crafting Happy Citizens in Soviet

Whilst working at the Academy of Communist Education,¹⁸⁰ Luria undertook comparative studies of children from different class backgrounds. ‘Speech and Intellect among Rural, Urban and Homeless Children’ (1930) is a comparative study of the urban city school child, the rural child and the ‘urchin’ child. Such comparative studies were a common feature of pedological investigations, which set out to distinguish between nature and nurture.¹⁸¹ Luria’s research methodology was typical of the contemporary experimental methodologies and exemplifies the pedological approach. As with his descriptions of Uzbek peasants, the Soviet children Luria described, particularly the homeless children, were a far cry from the ideal builders of communism envisioned by the architects of the Soviet state.

Luria set out to show that speech development was tied to a child’s environment:

A person’s class and his particular social experience fill his mind with a quite specific content, and the study of this content not only is of considerable interest for the infant science of psychology of classes but is also of indisputable psychological interest.¹⁸²

He investigated the children’s responses to verbal stimuli – presenting them with single words and asking them to respond by association, a similar method to that used in his experiments with criminals that form the basis of *The Nature of Human Conflicts* (1932). Environment was assumed to have an impact on both the form and

Children’s Literature of the 1920’ in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, ed. by Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (London; Anthem Press, 2009), pp. 99-114.

¹⁸⁰ A discussion of this institution, run by Lenin’s widow Nadezhda Krupskaya (a major figure in Soviet education) is beyond the scope of this thesis. Luria was involved with the Academy from 1923 until 1930 when it moved to Leningrad. He worked there with Vygotsky and a team of five other researchers. Luria reflected that he, who had no party affiliation at that time and was only 22 when he first began working there, was rather out of place among the fervently ideological ‘grown-up Party activists’ who ran the place. He goes on to note that despite the more zealous commitment of others to the revolutionary cause, Vygotsky’s approach was the only ‘real, not sham’ Marxist psychology developed in the period. See, K.E. Levitin, ‘A Criminal Investigation’, *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 36, 5 (1998), 46-75, pp. 74-75.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Semunova and Bolunova, ‘Rech’ sovremennogo russkogo proletarskogo i krest’ianskogo rebionka doshkol’nogo vozrata’ [‘The contemporary Russian proletarian and peasant child at preschool age’], *Pedologiya*, 2 (1928) 47-60, Syrkin, ‘Materialy k voprosu o fizicheskom razvitiu proletarskogo i krest’ianskogo rebionka’, [‘Materials on the question of the physical differences between proletarian and peasant children’], *Pedologiya*, 1-2 (1929), 133-138, Vilenkina, ‘Sravnitel’nyi analiz social’no bytovykh uslovii moskovskikh detei raznykh social’nykh grupp’ [‘A comparative analysis of the social and living conditions of Moscow children of different social groups’], *Pedologiya*, 1-2 (1929), 157-166, E. Netchaeva, Vilyanie sredy na trudovuyu napravlyennost’ podrostkov’ [‘The Influence of the Surroundings upon the Industrial Capacity of Adolescents’] *Pedologiya*, 1 (1930), 43-53.

content of thought: it was not only concluded that a rural child would know more about farm animals than urban children, but that the speed of their responses was specific to the pace and stability of their environment.

Luria noted a contrast between ‘accidental, individualised memories’ and ‘routine associations common to the entire group’¹⁸³ and attached a high value to the ‘homogeneity of collective experience’.¹⁸⁴ Urban school children emerged from the study as the most advanced as they had a greater grasp of reality beyond their daily experiences. These educated urban children were on their way to becoming the ideal educated adults at the pinnacle of Luria’s mountain of development. The homogeneity of the rural children’s outlook was attributed to their relatively stable experiences, whereas the urban school children were shown to be developing a more abstract notion of shared identity. Luria claimed that schools

expose the child to experiences in all spheres of life, and there is practically nothing that is totally foreign to him. The material to which he is exposed in his schoolwork makes nature and society just as accessible to him as the direct impressions he receives from his environment.¹⁸⁵

Urban schoolchildren were as capable of recognising a rake as their rural counterparts who were unable to name objects they had not physically encountered. Luria reported that 40 rural children gave 30 different responses to the word ‘Union’, a conclusion similar to that reached by the group of pedologists who conducted experiments with children in remote Siberia in the same period (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). In contrast, the urban schoolchildren without exception pointed to social or political forms of organisation: their answers included ‘Soviet’, ‘Youth’, ‘Trade Union’, ‘Workers’, ‘USSR’.¹⁸⁶ Luria assumed that simply making these verbal associations equated to comprehending the concepts they describe. Unlike Benjamin who emphasised children’s capacity to make idiosyncratic associations in order to create ‘amazing prose’, Luria was interested in the establishment of stable and shared forms of comprehension.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Luria, ‘Speech and Intellect among Rural, Urban and Homeless Children’ in *Soviet Developmental Psychology*, ed. by Michael Cole (New York, NY; ME Sharpe, 1977), pp. 32-64, p. 35.

¹⁸³ Luria, ‘Speech and Intellect...’, p. 44.

¹⁸⁴ Luria, ‘Speech and Intellect...’, p. 46.

¹⁸⁵ Luria, ‘Speech and Intellect...’, p. 51.

¹⁸⁶ Luria, ‘Speech and Intellect...’, p. 55.

The *besprizornye* emerged as the furthest behind in Luria's linear trajectory of development. They experience the world 'kaleidoscopically' due to the instability of their daily lives, each providing completely different associations to words like 'home' for obvious concrete reasons. Luria's experiments revealed the abjection experienced by these children. They had 'grown up without any direct exposure to the influence of stable, familiar, more or less unchanging circumstances.'¹⁸⁸ The homeless children were unfamiliar with formal reasoning and therefore responded slowly to the psychologists' questions:

Anything even resembling a problem divorced from real life is a novelty to him [...] the urchin, who is quick and deft at coping with the situations of everyday life, becomes quickly disoriented and proceeds slowly in the contrived situations of an experiment, in which, moreover, we employed abstract linguistic (associative) operations.¹⁸⁹

Furthermore, they were, like many of the peasants Luria encountered in Uzbekistan, and presumably for similarly experiential reasons, distrustful of the adults conducting the experiments. Luria sympathetically notes an emotional component in the child's responses that accompanied their intellectual confusion: 'The urchin has had to wage a bitter struggle with life, and that struggle has left its specific emotional traces on him.'¹⁹⁰ These children may have scored low on standardised tests but Luria insisted that 'in potential they are fully normal; and under the right conditions, they could develop into complete, highly productive, human beings.'¹⁹¹ Here, as with his experiments in Central Asia, Luria rejected biological determinism, but still insisted on the superiority of certain modes of thinking and forms of knowledge over others.

Luria's conclusions were based on an 'index of commonality':¹⁹² greater homogeneity in responses to questions not only indicated greater socialisation but was also said to represent a 'higher' form of thought (the capacity to think abstractly). Luria noted approvingly that educated urban children were beginning to recognise the contours of the new Soviet order being constructed around them. In contrast, he emphasised the inability of street children to comprehend both abstract

¹⁸⁷ Benjamin, 'A Glimpse..', p. 435.

¹⁸⁸ Luria, 'Speech and Intellect...', p. 58.

¹⁸⁹ Luria, 'Speech and Intellect...', pp. 38-39.

¹⁹⁰ Luria, 'Speech and Intellect...', p. 39.

¹⁹¹ Luria, 'Speech and Intellect...', p. 41.

concepts and concrete objects beyond their direct experiences. However, Luria understood development in relation to the dominant society and therefore read differences in response as inadequacies of thought. Despite his claims to acknowledge equality of intelligence, his conclusions nonetheless implicitly equate ignorance of certain objects and concepts with a lack of intelligence, in precisely the terms criticised by Rancière. He could, for instance, have considered the internal rules, languages and norms that structured the lives of Soviet street children.¹⁹³ A vagrant child may not have been able to describe the interior of a house or to define a Trade Union or *kolkhoz*, but the words that peppered homeless children's vocabulary – including slang terms for cigarette butts, cocaine, pickpockets, policemen and prisons – would presumably have been equally as incomprehensible to a rural or urban schoolchild.¹⁹⁴

It was this unique language that Benjamin declared pedagogues needed to penetrate in order to communicate with the 'infantile masses': 'To get through to them at all, to be heard one has to relate as directly and clearly as possible the catchwords of the street itself.'¹⁹⁵ These words were key to understanding their 'collective life' whose structure was, Benjamin insisted, inherently political: 'Politics, in the organisation of crowds of such children, is not tendentious, but as natural a subject, as obvious a visual aid, as the toyshop or dollhouse for middle-class children.'¹⁹⁶ Asja Lacis worked closely with Soviet street children. Despite relating a story in which a child in her care violently beat in the skull of his playmate, she insisted that she found the wildest children to be the most gifted.¹⁹⁷

Benjamin's descriptions of Moscow's urchin children – with their ragged clothes, strange assortments of belongings and dirty bodies - might be aligned with the figure of the ragpicker who haunts the arcades:

He collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery, and the jumbled array of refuse. He makes a

¹⁹² Luria, 'Speech and Intellect...', p. 45.

¹⁹³ On these internal rules, see Zenzinov, p. 127.

¹⁹⁴ Ball lists some of the terms specific to the dialect of *besprizornye*, p. 38.

¹⁹⁵ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 27.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin, 'Moscow', p. 27.

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 21.

selection, an intelligent choice; like a miser hoarding treasure, he collects the garbage that will become objects of utility or pleasure when refurbished.¹⁹⁸

The ragpicker not only sifts through the waste of society and of history but is their waste product. Though a ‘provocative figure of human misery’, the ragpicker creates and builds amid the ruins.¹⁹⁹ Benjamin explicitly links the child to the collector.²⁰⁰ Like children playing or reading fairy tales, who repurpose the scraps of waste generated by adult activity, the ragpicker reinvigorates the rubbish. Benjamin suggested that the visitor to Moscow should attempt to see the city from the viewpoint of its street children: ‘One ought to know Moscow as such beggar children know it’.²⁰¹ Soviet communism, like capitalism, failed to banish human immiseration. Unlike Luria, Benjamin was able to acknowledge that Stalinist ideology was founded on a promise of happiness that the regime failed to deliver. Benjamin’s work suggests that in order to finally rid the world’s streets of the misery embodied in figures like the ragpicker or the street child, history should be approached from their perspective, as a heap of rubble from which it might still be possible to wrest some sparkling shards of hope.²⁰² That would have necessitated looking down from the gleaming progressive road Luria’s work attempted to map out to examine the potholes and litter on the streets beneath his feet.

Conclusion

Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognise the new once again.²⁰³

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

¹⁹⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 349.

¹⁹⁹ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 349.

²⁰⁰ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 21.

²⁰¹ Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, p. 28.

²⁰² Benjamin’s assessment of Siegfried Kracauer is also pertinent here: ‘a ragpicker, at daybreak, picking up the rags of speech and verbal scraps with his stick and tossing them, grumbling and growling, a little drunk, into his cart, not without letting one or other of those faded calicoes – ‘humanity’, ‘inner nature’, ‘absorption’ – flutter derisively in the breeze. A ragpicker, early on, at the dawn of the day of revolution’, ‘An Outsider Makes His Mark’ (1930), *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 305-311, p. 310.

²⁰³ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 390.

On July 5th 1936 the front page of *Pravda* was dominated by the news of the VKP(b) Central Committee decree ‘On Pedological Perversions in the Narkompros System’.²⁰⁴ Pedologists were attacked for emphasising environmental factors over psychological propensities, passivity over activity. Pedological publications focusing on Soviet children growing up in different social milieus, such as Luria’s study of the *besprizornye*, revealed how far the Soviet Union was from constructing its ideal model citizens. It was alleged that the reports and the standardised tests they espoused tended towards description rather than intervention, echoing the arguments deployed to attack Luria’s research in Central Asia. Despite their revolutionary zeal, pedologists were forced to recant and furiously attempted to make amends: ‘The fact that subjectively we considered our theory revolutionary has no relevance. By excluding the purposive [*tselepolagayushchaya*] activity of man, his interference in the course of events, we automatically excluded also the necessity of educative work.’²⁰⁵ Pedology was declared a failure as it was said to describe human beings helplessly responding to their environment, rather than fostering dedicated revolutionaries intent on re-directing the course of history. Zalkind is alleged to have dropped dead upon hearing the news of the discipline’s official denunciation.²⁰⁶ Vygotsky’s work was blacklisted until the end of the Stalin era.²⁰⁷ Luria’s experiments with children were terminated and he turned to focus on neurological research (it is unclear what happened to the 750 sets of twins under observation in Moscow). By the time of the decree, Stalin had consolidated his position and many of the radical assumptions about childhood and family life that had characterised the post-revolutionary period were overturned.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ ‘O Pedologicheskikh Izvrashcheniyakh v Sisteme Harkomprosov’ [‘On the Pedological Perversions of the Narkompros System’], *Pravda*, July 5 1936, p. 1.

²⁰⁵ A.S. Zaluzhnyi, *Lzhenauka pedologiya v ‘trudakh’ Zalkinda* (Moscow, 1937), pp. 20-21, cited in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 229-230.

²⁰⁶ Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible*, p. 277.

²⁰⁷ The precise implications of the decree and the status of Vygotsky’s work during the Stalin period is examined in Jennifer Fraser and Anton Yasnitsky ‘Deconstructing Vygotsky’s Victimization Narrative: A Re-Examination of the “Stalinist Suppression” of Vygotskian Theory’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 28 (2015), 128-153.

²⁰⁸ In her wide-ranging discussion of Russian childhood, Catriona Kelly considers 1935 as a watershed year in the history of Soviet childhood. She considers the period from the revolution until 1935 as a discrete epoch characterised by competing but often radical ideas about the child. As well as the decree on pedology, 1935 and 1936 saw major policy reforms that effected children. Legislative changes included lowering the age of criminal responsibility, cracking down on waifdom, an upsurge in propaganda aimed at families and policy shifts in schools that placed an increased emphasis on authority and discipline. See, Kelly, *Children’s World*, pp. 61-92.

Luria's research participated in the Soviet pedagogical project, which emerged from a period of multivalent often genuinely experimental approaches to child psychology and education. Anton Makarenko's work dominated Soviet pedagogy in the wake of the decree on pedagogy, advocating strict, militaristic authority: 'austere rhythm, iron discipline and distinguished bearing'.²⁰⁹ But even the most utopian visions of childhood developed in the aftermath of revolution tended to imagine the transition to adulthood as a transition from chaos to order, paralleling the Leninist narrative of the movement of history towards communism. Anna Louise Strong's depiction of the experimental John Reed Children's Colony published in 1925, for example, concluded by contrasting the 'weeds, broken fences, disorder' of the old landscape with the 'acres of ploughed fields' across which a young communist hero advances in his tractor.²¹⁰

Disrupted, disorganised, impulsive, spontaneous - the child in Luria's account is a chaos who perceives the world as an undifferentiated confusion of 'noises and splotches'.²¹¹ He and Vygotsky wrote that the young child performs 'an imbroglio of actions [...] [a] rich and often grotesque mixture of mutually contradictory forms.'²¹² The child's 'splintered and peculiar' perception was presented as a mess that needed tidying up.²¹³ According to Luria, the chaotic inner life of the baby was soon replaced by the order of the cultural world. Paradoxically, as with his research in Central Asia, revolutionary thinking was defined as the ability to comprehend existing reality rather than transform it.

Luria distinguished between chaos and order, irrationality and reason, ignorance and knowledge as successive stages. Even taking this linear understanding of individual development on its own terms, however, it still overlooked the co-existence of children with adults, their interactions and interruptions. After all, new 'disorderly' babies continued being born. Luria may have dispensed with the

²⁰⁹ Anton S. Makarenko, *The Road to Life: An Epic in Education* (New York, NY; Oriole Editions, 1951), p. 414.

²¹⁰ Anna Louise Strong, *Children of Revolution: Story of the John Reed Children's Colony* (Seattle, Piggot Press, 1925), p. 98.

²¹¹ Luria and Vygotsky, 'The Child...', p. 145.

²¹² Luria and Vygotsky, 'Tool...', p. 117.

²¹³ Luria and Vygotsky, 'Tool...', p. 125.

Freudian unconscious, a dangerously prehistoric internal reservoir, but he could not dispense with the external existence of children who he and Vygotsky described in terms strangely reminiscent of Freud's definition of the unconscious: 'There are no contradictions for the child, he does not see them, contradictory judgments can coexist not excluding one another.'²¹⁴

Luria's naturally chaotic newborn infant had a historical counterpart in the figure of the abandoned child; the *besprizornye* threatened to disrupt the supposedly inevitable course of both individual and historical development. For as Benjamin declared: 'As long as there is still one beggar around, there will still be myth.'²¹⁵ In Luria's account of development, the incoherence of the baby could soon be overcome, even as the actual children he encountered in his research failed to corroborate this thesis. The existence of these abject children thus also function as a reminder of the persistence of the abject or irrational *within* psychic life, that Luria's work sought to displace.

Five years after the decree that banned pedology, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Second World War was to have a lasting impact on Luria's work. The pinnacle of development in Luria's work was the 'civilized', educated adult but these were precisely the people who ended up in Luria's psychiatric wards with bullets in their brains. In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' Benjamin perceived that the 'vulgar Marxist' celebration of the progressive mastery of humanity over nature failed to acknowledge the 'retrogression of society' that accompanied it.²¹⁶ As Adorno and Horkheimer declare in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 'Civilization leads back to the terrors of nature.'²¹⁷ Work with brain-injured soldiers dominated Luria's post-war work - wounded people he was dedicated to healing. In these cases, however, incoherence could not be overcome. The process of healing proved partial but not futile, forcing Luria to confront the

²¹⁴ Luria and Vygotsky, 'The Child...', p. 164.

²¹⁵ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 400.

²¹⁶ Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 393.

²¹⁷ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Norr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 89.

persistence of the shattered in the midst of habitual life, without ever giving up hope of a creating a radically different society.

Chapter 4

The Wounded Subject: Between Woundedness and Healing

The life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself [...] Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face.¹

G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807

He felt more comfortable on the burnt-out star of the earth when he was unhappy; a glimpse of some strange and far away happiness aroused feelings of shame and anxiety in him - he wasn't conscious of it, but what he really wanted was for the new world they were eternally building to resemble his own shattered life.²

Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, 1930

Already in Marx there lies concealed a wound.³

Theodor Adorno, 'On Resignation,' 1961

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans by A.V. Miller (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 19. This passage is cited by Theodor Adorno in the opening pages of *Minima Moralia, Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London; Verso, 2005), p. 16.

² Andrey Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, trans. by Robert Chandler and Geoffrey Smith (London; Harvill Press, 1996), p. 73.

³ Theodor Adorno, 'On Resignation' in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York, NY; Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 289-389, p. 290.

Introduction

On the Pratzén heights, at the spot where he had fallen with the flagstaff in his hand, lay Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, losing blood and, without realising it, moaning a soft, plaintive moan like a child.

Toward evening his complaining ceased and he became quite still. He did not know how long his unconsciousness lasted. Suddenly he felt again that he was alive and suffering from a burning, lacerating pain in his head.

“Where is the lofty sky I saw today and had never seen before?” was his first thought. “And this agony I did not know either,” he thought. “Yes, I knew nothing, nothing till now. But where am I?”⁴

The above passage is from Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1865-68). A century after the novel’s publication Alexander Luria wrote to his friend Jerome Bruner from the estate of the aristocrat upon whom Tolstoy based Andrei Bolkonsky. He declared he was at work on his own ‘neurological novel’.⁵ Luria’s book would also describe a man wounded in battle who awakens from unconsciousness like a ‘newborn creature’ to a life of suffering he had not previously known.⁶ Luria described the case history as ‘a little book about a great tragedy - a man with a bullet in his brain who lost his world, his past and his future.’⁷ *The Man with a Shattered World: The History of a Brain Wound* (1972), focuses on Zasetzky, a former Red Army soldier who fought in the Second World War, surviving a bullet wound to the head that permanently damaged his cerebral functioning (Plate 4.1). Like Tolstoy’s epic novel, Luria’s little book is also a comment on its epoch, a meditation on war and peace, and a sombre reflection on Russian history.

This chapter situates Luria’s history of a brain wound in the shattered world that produced it; the bullet that penetrated Zasetzky’s brain and the burnt tissue it left behind is treated as a metonym for the impact of the Second World War on Soviet history. Luria composed the text in a self-consciously literary style. As such, this chapter situates *The Man with a Shattered World* in the context of twentieth-century literary debates. However, the non-fictional status of the book - the material

⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. by Rosemary Edmunds (London; Penguin, 1978), p. 338.

⁵ Luria to Bruner, December 20 1969, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Archives (HUA), Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975-1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

⁶ Alexander Luria, *The Man with a Shattered World: The History of a Brain Wound* trans by Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 10.

⁷ Luria to Bruner, December 20 1969, HUA, Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975-1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

conditions it arose from, the neurological condition it describes and the therapeutic process Zasetzky engaged in - forced Luria to deviate from existing narrative models. The scarred surface of the case history stages a dialectic between woundedness and healing. As with his experiments with 'primitives' and children, in his work with brain-injured people Luria hoped to facilitate and describe a progressive movement from chaos to order, a movement that paralleled his political vision. However, unlike in the developmental paths traced in the preceding chapters of this thesis, where Luria was confident that consciousness would succeed spontaneity, *The Man with a Shattered World* is incapable of reaching a final moment of synthesis. The wounded subject Luria describes emerges as a figure who, as the result of violent catastrophe, lost his connection to the past and the present but, ultimately, retained hope for the future. Luria's text describes the lasting damage of his patient's injury, the interminability of the struggle to heal, and yet it resists sinking into apathy. As such, the case history suggests an alternative to the progressive narratives that informed Luria's earlier works; by acknowledging the violence of history, it opens up the possibility for ameliorating the damage inflicted, and for guarding against the repetition of similar catastrophes in the future.

New Wounded

In *The New Wounded* (2012), Catherine Malabou asks what mode of expression might adequately capture the experience of her eponymous injured figures. For Malabou, the 'new wounded' are people who have experienced a severe neuronal disturbance. Her definition encompasses post-traumatic shock, degenerative disease and brain injury, and is metaphorically extended to include any experience that dramatically interrupts the course of a person's life. The condition, she insists, takes a single form: it is characterised by 'coolness, neutrality, absence, and the state of being emotionally "flat"'.⁸ The 'new wounded' live in a perennial present, cut off from past identity and future hopes; their suffering is a peculiar form of pain that 'manifests as an indifference to pain, impassivity, forgetting, the loss of symbolic reference points.'⁹ She sees this indifferent subjectivity reflected in the apathy of

⁸ Malabou, *The New Wounded* (New York; Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 53. For an in depth consideration of the political implications of Malabou's work see my review essay: 'The Post-Traumatic Condition', *Radical Philosophy*, 177 (2013), 40-43.

the contemporary moment.

Malabou approaches the question of representing the subjectivities of the 'new wounded' through a consideration of case histories dealing with people with serious neurological defects. She discusses Luria's case history *The Man with a Shattered World* alongside those by the popular American neurologist Oliver Sacks, criticising both authors for what she sees as a false imposition of affect onto their subjects, for their attempts to 'weave the patient's coolness, indifference, and the disintegration of emotion into a narrative intrigue that must not be disaffected itself.'¹⁰ The paradox she identifies in such an exercise is that by transforming their subjects into exemplary cases, their narratives cannot be as detached as she presumes their patients' subjectivities are. The works impose a redemptive structure on the patients' conditions, rather than displaying a form of psychic damage that she insists is fundamentally beyond all repair. Malabou's 'new figures of the void' can only be thought in relation to destructive plasticity, a plasticity 'that does not repair, a plasticity without recompense or scar, one that cuts the thread of life.'¹¹ Following both cerebral and social 'accidents', an entirely new subject emerges, totally discontinuous from any previous identity. The identity that does emerge is, according to Malabou, blank and featureless, devoid of any capacity or will to actively forge a new identity in the future.

Malabou's adherence to a singular definition of post-traumatic subjectivity precludes her from analysing the ways in which Luria's case history fundamentally differ from Sacks's. One major reason for this is her failure to consider the huge spectrum of responses that might be produced by brain damage. Sacks's best-selling *Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985) focuses on people with right-hemisphere disorders. With injuries to the right-hemisphere, the patient not only loses their grasp of reality but is also unaware of this loss. As Jacqueline Rose discusses, Sacks presents a crisis of 'the narrative function itself, which is either missing, frozen in time, or else acted out in a type of wild and meaningless

⁹ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay in Destructive Plasticity* trans. by Carolyn Shread (London; Polity Press, 2012), p. 18.

¹⁰ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

¹¹ Malabou, *Ontology*, p. 6.

superabundance.¹² This, Rose is quick to point out, distinguishes Sacks's work from both Freud and Luria's case histories. Sacks's cases are populated by people who are in a state of constantly renewed crisis; there is no progression or resolution. Sacks describes subjects who experience time as suspended, but lack any awareness or anxiety about its suspension.¹³ The characters that populate *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* might indeed be said to exhibit some of the qualities Malabou associates with the 'new wounded'. In contrast, Luria's patient Zasetzky did not sustain damage to the frontal cortex. Despite the enormous problems he faced, this enabled him to retain the capacity to make and carry out plans. Furthermore, Luria claims, the exact cerebral location of his patient's injury also accounted for his acute sense of loss, his painful, conscious awareness of what had befallen him.¹⁴

Malabou follows Sacks in considering his work as part of a single continuum with Luria's.¹⁵ In his introduction to *The Man with a Shattered World*, Sacks describes Luria as 'an original who thought in his own way'.¹⁶ He claims that Luria's work was 'always and centrally concerned with identity' and suffused with 'warmth, feeling and moral beauty.'¹⁷ Luria's case histories are described in terms reminiscent of a Hollywood film trailer as 'struggles with adversity.'¹⁸ Although elsewhere Malabou provocatively argues that brains should be understood in relation to history,¹⁹ both Sacks and Malabou overlook the historical and cultural specificity of Luria's case histories. Malabou fails to apply her own insight that 'any vision of the brain is necessarily political.'²⁰ She asserts that the 'new wounded' are emblematic of the political torpor of the neoliberal (presumably post-1989) present, insisting that destructive plasticity 'refuses the promise, belief, symbolic constitution of all

¹² Jacqueline Rose, 'The "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" or "A Wife Is like an Umbrella"-Fantasies of the Modern and Postmodern', *Social Text*, 1 (1989), 237-250, p. 238.

¹³ See, Oliver Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York, NY; Summit Books, 1985).

¹⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 34.

¹⁵ Similar assumptions are also made in Anne Harrington, 'The Inner Lives of Disordered Brains', *DANA Foundation*, 1 (2005) and Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 206.

¹⁶ Sacks in Luria, *Shattered*, p. viii.

¹⁷ Sacks in Luria, *Shattered*, p. xvi.

¹⁸ Sacks in Luria, *Shattered*, p. xiii.

¹⁹ For a detailed consideration of this question, see my essay: 'Neuronal Ideologies: Catherine Malabou in Light of A. R. Luria', *Dandelion*, 2, 1, 2011, 1-13.

²⁰ Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* trans. by Sebastian Rand (New York : Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 52.

resources to come.²¹ It operates in the open space left in the wake of the ‘collapse of messianic structures.’²² Destructive plasticity refuses salvation and redemption, placing a prohibition on thinking other possibilities: ‘It has nothing to do with the tenacious, incurable desire to transform what has taken place.’²³ Instead, she claims, destructive plasticity ‘deploys its work starting from the exhaustion of all possibilities, when all virtuality has left long ago, when the child in the adult is erased, when cohesion is destroyed, family spirit vanished, friendship lost, links dissipated in the ever more intense cold of a barren life.’²⁴ By giving Luria’s case its history back and by analysing the text’s peculiar formal qualities, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which his dialectical account of brain injury combines destruction with creation, woundedness with healing, fragmentation with unity. Despite the severity of the injury it describes, *The Man with a Shattered World* insists on thinking other possibilities and on dialectically transforming what has taken place. By refusing to sink into apathy, Luria’s text provides an alternative vision of the wounded subject to the ‘new wounded’ described by Malabou, which also proposes an alternative, more hopeful, political vision. By returning to the past, Luria’s case history suggests a way of thinking beyond the desolate present Malabou describes.

Wartime Work: Adaptation and Restoration

Luria begins *The Man With The Shattered World* with a brief description of Zasetzky's life before his brain injury: 'In the beginning it was all so simple. His past was much like other people's: life had its problems, but was simple enough, and the future seemed promising.'²⁵ The narrative voice then switches. Zasetzky's first-person narrative begins by stating: 'Then suddenly it was all over.'²⁶ The sudden event that brought his previous life abruptly to an end was not his injury but the Soviet declaration of war: 'Early one morning I was headed for the institute, thinking about my future, when suddenly I heard, actually shuddered at, the terrible news:

²¹ Malabou, *Ontology*, p. 88.

²² Malabou, *Ontology*, p. 88.

²³ Malabou, *Ontology*, p. 89.

²⁴ Malabou, *Ontology*, pp. 89-90.

²⁵ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 3

²⁶ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 6

there as a war on with Germany!²⁷ The war not only interrupted the present, it also blocked the path to the future. Zasetsky's life story is thus placed in the framework of historical events.

On June 22 1941, Germany broke its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa was the largest invasion in military history. It was two weeks before Stalin finally addressed his Soviet 'brothers and sisters', mobilising the masses for 'a war of the entire Soviet people' in which perhaps as many as 30 million of the country's citizens would meet their deaths.²⁸

Like the revolution and Stalinist 'great break' that preceded it, the Second World War was a violently transformative moment in Soviet history, Zasetsky's life and Luria's career. Amir Weiner challenges the view that the revolution and subsequent socioeconomic transformations of the 1920s and 1930s should be seen as the exclusive 'formative and enduring moments' in the life of the Soviet polity.²⁹ The Second World War, he argues, played as crucial a function in re-shaping the revolutionary narrative, disrupting and consolidating Soviet identities in new ways, and forging myths that would ultimately outlive the Soviet Union itself. Weiner conceives of the revolution as a constantly unfurling project punctuated by a series of traumatic events that both shaped and were shaped by the ongoing enterprise of building communism:

Within this chain of cataclysms, the war was universally perceived as the Armageddon of the Revolution, the ultimate clash dreaded yet expected by the first generation to live in socialist society, the event that would either vindicate or bring down the system.³⁰

The almost inconceivably brutal experience of the war had a lasting impact on Soviet subjectivities and the archetypes, narratives and images that claimed to represent and helped to shape those subjectivities.

²⁷ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 6

²⁸ Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (London; Penguin, 1997), p. 79.

²⁹ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 14.

³⁰ Weiner, p. 17.

This thesis has demonstrated that Luria's career was informed by the pivotal events that dotted Soviet history. As with the major historic events that preceded it, echoes of the official narratives identified by Weiner can be found in Luria's work. In his autobiography he writes:

World War II was a disaster for all countries, and it was particularly devastating for the Soviet Union. Thousands of towns were destroyed, tens of thousands of people died from hunger alone. Many millions, both civilian and military, were killed. Among the wounded were thousands who suffered brain injury and who required extended painstaking care. The unity of purpose of the Soviet people so clearly felt during the great Revolution and the subsequent years re-emerged in new forms. A sense of common responsibility and common purpose gripped the country. Each of us knew we had an obligation to work together with our countrymen to meet the challenge. We each had to find our place in the struggle.³¹

Luria clearly situated his own medical work within the broader collective war effort. Also, in conformity with Weiner's observations, he explicitly positioned the war in relation to the project of the revolution. The war appears as a devastating event that united the nation around a shared goal.

Following the outbreak of war, Luria briefly joined the volunteer corps before being commissioned to organise a hospital to care for those who required treatment away from the front. In the 1930s, Luria had entered medical school and re-trained as a neurologist, splitting his time between his studies in Moscow and psychological work in Kharkov. He graduated from medical school in 1937. During the war, the focus of his work was on people who had survived traumatic brain injuries. Aphasia, a neurological condition resulting in the partial or complete loss of speech, occupies a prominent place in his publications.³² Luria set up a 400 bed sanatorium in Kisegatch near Cheliabensk in the southern Urals, overseeing the construction of laboratories and therapeutic training rooms. There he worked with a team of thirty researchers whose tasks were to diagnose and treat brain injuries. They worked to develop 'rational, scientifically based techniques for the rehabilitation of destroyed functions.'³³ He wrote to Sergei Eisenstein describing the situation in favourable terms: 'I have a lot of staff with me and the work is going well and

³¹ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 138.

³² See the bibliography: G. Braemer and W. Jantzen, 'Bibliographie der Arbeiten von A.R. Lurija' in *Die neurolen Verstickungen des Bewusstseins* (Münster; LIT Verlag, 1994), pp. 267-345.

³³ Luria, *Making of a Mind*, p. 139.

productively - I've even started producing some books.³⁴ Luria noted that despite their modest equipment, his team's 'most important resource was dedication to the task.'³⁵ This was not routine scientific research but research carried out in service to the state.

Modern warfare is central to the history of the study of aphasia. Vast numbers of soldiers survived the First World War with serious brain injuries. The analysis of these casualties of modernity led to new insights into neuronal functioning and new therapeutic methods of rehabilitation. Kurt Goldstein in Germany and Henry Head in Britain dedicated themselves to healing people (overwhelmingly men) wounded in the Great War.³⁶ Like Luria's subsequent Soviet research, these scientists also emphasised the social function of their work, albeit in very different national contexts. Luria's work was explicitly indebted to their endeavours. Like Goldstein, he emphasised adaptation, readjustment and empathy, and understood wounds as both physical and psychological.³⁷ The rehabilitative workshops that Luria set up in the Urals (which later moved to Moscow) were a counterpart to those established by Goldstein at the Institute for Research into the Consequence of Brain Injuries in Frankfurt. Luria followed Head in observing patients over long periods of time and similarly cast his patients as 'allies' and collaborators in the therapeutic process.³⁸

Luria's *Traumatic Aphasia*, published in the USSR in 1947, draws on Luria's wartime work.³⁹ Juergen Tesak and Chris Code give the book a privileged place in

³⁴ Luria to Eisenstein, May 11 1942, Moscow, Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (RGALI), Sergei Eisenstein Papers, 123-1-19321/2-13.

³⁵ Luria, *Making of a Mind*, p. 139.

³⁶ See, Kurt Goldstein, *Aftereffects of Brain Injuries in War* (New York, NY; Grune and Stratton, 1942) and Henry Head, *Aphasia and Kindred Disorders of Speech* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1926).

³⁷ Anne Harrington discusses Goldstein's research in relation to German understandings of holism. She argues that Goldstein insisted that analysis of brain-injured patients provided insights into humanity that were central to his liberal vision of society. She claims he saw 'brain-injured patients not just as an exemplary model for neurology, but also as an existential philosophy and blueprint of personal politics.' Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 154.

³⁸ On Head's wartime research, patriotic commitments and relationship to his patients as 'allies' or 'willing collaborators', see, L.S. Jacyna, *Lost Words: Narratives of Language and the Brain, 1825-1926* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 150-170.

³⁹ See, A.R. Luria, *Traumatic Aphasia: Its Syndromes, Psychology and Treatment*, trans. by Macdonald Critchley (The Hague, Mouton, 1970). For the Russian text, see: *Travmaticheskaiia Afasiia: Vosstanovitelnaia terapiia [Traumatic Aphasia: Rehabilitative Therapy]* (Moscow; Akademiia Meditsinskikh Nauk, SSSR, 1947).

the history of aphasia: 'Of all the work on aphasia that has come from studying the victims of war, this book perhaps deserves to be recognised as the most inspired and influential.'⁴⁰ Luria discusses how the war provided unprecedented opportunities for neurologists to examine the impact of localised brain injury. The people who sustained injuries tended to be young, which improved their chances of overcoming some of the injuries' impact (a factor also emphasised by Head). The priorities were to rehabilitate people as swiftly as possible with the aim to return them to service in the Red Army or, if their injuries were too severe, to a productive civilian life. The initial emphasis of treatment was focused on the healing of physical wounds. Following this stage, Luria and his team focused on rehabilitating their patients, attempting to discover ways they might recover their lost brain functions. They developed therapeutic techniques which incorporated practical tasks, which encouraged patients to relearn forgotten skills.

By 1943 he and his team had already amassed 800 case histories. In Luria's work the term 'trauma' [*travma*], in accordance with its etymological roots, refers exclusively to physical wounds. In *Traumatic Aphasia*, he gives little consideration to the emotional impact of war injuries or to the emotional efforts required to restore brain functions. Trauma is something that happens to the tissue of the brain. Luria's use of the term was consistent with the dominant Soviet understanding. The state cultivated an image of brave masculine fighters seemingly impervious to the war's horrific events. Catherine Merridale refers to 'the disappearance of individual trauma as an issue of public debate' in the Soviet Union, tying it to the state denial of the hardship, suffering and terror it unleashed on the population in the 1930s, as well as a shifting emphasis from the individual to the collective.⁴¹ Eyes needed to be dry and fixed resolutely on the bright future.

Short case histories are littered throughout *Traumatic Aphasia*, as they are in Luria's 1948 study *Restoration of Function after Brain Injury*, but these only give minimal details about the context of the injury, the patient's personal history or their

⁴⁰ Juergen Tesak and Chris Code, *Milestones in the History of Aphasia: Theories and Protagonists* (Hove; Psychology Press, 2008), p. 154.

⁴¹ Catherine Merridale, 'The Collective Mind: Trauma and Shell-Shock in Twentieth-Century Russia,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1 (2000), 39-55, p. 48. See also, Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last*

emotional state in the hospital. Instead, they all follow a similar format, providing the date and geographical location of injury, a description of the wound and a short account of the treatment procedure. Occasional glimpses of the affective impact of the injuries are suggested by the inclusion of short extracts from patients' first-hand accounts of their own conditions, which briefly interrupt the neutral medical tone.⁴² These perfunctory de-personalised narratives isolate wounds from the subjects that bear them. The case histories are organised according to injury type, reducing patients to a proper name and military rank. The only context provided functions to explain the physical impact of the wound. These works correspond to what Luria later criticised as a 'classical' scientific approach, governed by 'careful, consecutive, step-by-step reasoning' but prone to reductionism.⁴³ In stark contrast, *The Man with a Shattered World*, a detailed case history written 30 years after the war, provides a deeply personal and emotional account of the patient and his relationship to his injury, written in a literary style. Luria described his approach to this book as 'romantic', in that it intended to 'preserve the wealth of living reality.'⁴⁴

The Brezhnev-era (1964-1982), during which Luria wrote his case history, saw a huge revival of the cult of the Great Patriotic War. At a time when the Soviet Union's economy and global position were struggling, past triumphs were celebrated, national pride and unity extolled.⁴⁵ Although Luria's case history is imbued with many tropes that align it with popular representations of the war produced in the period, by refusing to cast the conflict as an ecstatic victory his work strikes a more mournful note. *The Man with a Shattered World* does not attempt to occlude suffering or deny the extraordinary difficulties Zasetsky faced following his injury. It thus acknowledges the lasting traumatic impact of war on the human subject in a manner occluded both by the dominant state-sanctioned narratives and by Luria's own medical texts from the immediate post-war period.

Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴² Luria includes an excerpt from Zasetsky's initial case history that conforms to this style in *The Man with a Shattered World*, pp. 21-22.

⁴³ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 174.

⁴⁵ See, Nina Tumarkin, *The Living And The Dead: The Rise And Fall Of The Cult Of World War II In Russia* (New York; Basic Books, 1994).

Despite being more circumspect on the emotional impact of war than *The Man with the Shattered World*, however, Luria's earlier texts on soldiers wounded in war are similarly addressed to the problem of overcoming or ameliorating the effects of brain injury. *Traumatic Aphasia* and *Restoration of Function after Brain Injury* are both concerned with the possibility of recovering from serious cerebral damage. Luria is clear that brain cells do not regenerate: 'the neuronal structures of the cortex, once destroyed, are incapable of regeneration.'⁴⁶ Total recovery is not a possibility; an inert scar will always remain. This does not, however, lead Luria to conclude that no improvement is possible. Unlike in Malabou's discussions of brain injury, he insists on the possibility of healing and restoring a sense of self, however partial or incomplete the result. Rather than focusing on full recovery, Luria is concerned with compensation, substitution and reorganisation. He developed forms of treatment that slowly enabled the brain to find new ways of performing the tasks that were once performed by the damaged areas of the brain, which he described as: 'Adaptation to new circumstances not to regeneration and restoration'.⁴⁷ Luria's work relied on a conception of the localisation of brain function which departed from the classic model proposed by German neurologist Carl Wernicke in its insistence on the mobility of the brain;⁴⁸ Luria understood the brain as a process rather than a product. In *Traumatic Aphasia* he describes the 'dynamic localisation of functional systems in the cerebral cortex', which he likens to a constellation or mosaic of interrelating zones.⁴⁹ He contrasted the 'uniform, undifferentiated grey' appearance of the brain to the 'inconceivable complexity and differentiation' revealed through scientific observation, insisting that the neurologist situate brains in people and people in the world.⁵⁰

For Luria, the disruption caused by a brain injury was always understood in relation to the specific functions it precludes. As such, brain injuries were always related to a patient's former existence and to the regular flows of life from which they were wrenched:

⁴⁶Luria, *Restoration of Function after Brain Injury*, trans by Oliver Zangwill, (Pergamon Press, 1963, London), p. 32. For the Russian text, see: *Vosstanovlenie funktsii mozga posle voennoi travmy*, [*Restoration of Brain Function after War Trauma*], (Moscow; izd-vo AMN SSSR, 1948).

⁴⁷ Luria, *Restoration*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ See, Tesak and Code, pp. 153-158.

⁴⁹ Luria, *Traumatic Aphasia*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 24.

Lesions exclude people from everyday life and work. Restoring their functions will enable them to reintegrate into society: How may such a patient be brought back into the daily round of social activity and work? What measures must be used so that this may be done as rationally as possible?⁵¹

Brain injuries 'disrupt the normal life of the patient, exclude him from social intercourse and from work, and may cause irreparable damage to his intellectual life.'⁵² Humans are distinguished from animals because they are more socially developed: 'Man's mental activity always takes place in a world of objects created during the development of society, is always directed towards them, and is frequently carried out with their aid.'⁵³ Greater levels of plasticity in humans also endow them a greater ability to reorient themselves to the world in the case of injury. Luria's research thus focused on restorative training using tools as external mediators between the patient and their environment. Although a long and arduous process, Luria insisted that some progress could be made: 'human activity can be restored notwithstanding the irreversible changes affecting those areas of the cortex responsible for its performance.'⁵⁴

Restoration, adaptation and compensation in the face of permanent injury are also the focus of *The Man with a Shattered World*. Zasetky is aware that he will never fully recover but is nonetheless committed to ameliorating his suffering. When Zasetky first awakens in hospital he is unable to orientate himself in his environment at all: 'Right after I was wounded, I seemed to be some newborn creature.'⁵⁵ It is from the opening passages of his account that Malabou quotes, as they best demonstrate the total discontinuity she associates with the 'new wounded'.⁵⁶ However, Zasetky does not remain in this position of total bewilderment; he slowly begins to find ways of anchoring himself in the world again: 'Afterwards, when I'd had a chance to hear words that people use in conversation or thinking, various clusters of "memory fragments" developed, and from these I began to make some sense out of the life around me.'⁵⁷

⁵¹ Luria, *Restoration*, p. 259.

⁵² Luria, *Restoration*, p. xi.

⁵³ Luria, *Restoration*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Luria, *Restoration*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 57.

⁵⁷ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 10.

In *Central Park* Walter Benjamin characterises spleen as 'that feeling which corresponds to catastrophe in permanence.' He likens the notion of eternal catastrophe to a kaleidoscope being turned in a child's hands. The cylinder is shaken, the loose coloured shards settle into a new position and a symmetrical image is formed in the mirrors. Something new is created but the act of turning the kaleidoscope simply 'collapses order into a new order'. The kaleidoscope's mirrors present a jumble of bright fragments as a neat image which, for Benjamin, stand for the ruling order, imposing regularity on an iridescent chaos. The solution for Benjamin is to smash the kaleidoscope, to let the beads bounce and scatter.⁵⁸ Weiner conceived of the war as one in a series of dramatic cataclysms that shook the Soviet Union. However, if the revolution was framed as a fundamental break with the past, a new beginning, then the Great Patriotic War, however concretely devastating, was envisioned as an attack from without that helped to consolidate the already established national identity. If the revolution smashed the kaleidoscope, then the war only shook the pieces. The threat of dissolution, of rupture, was to be resisted rather than celebrated. For Zasetsky, therefore, the future is in some sense always the past; recovery is about rediscovery, about reintegration into an existing world rather than a totally new beginning. Luria explicitly described it as a 'return to life.'⁵⁹

The process of re-learning the case history describes is historically and culturally specific: the reality Zasetsky reorients himself in is a specifically Soviet one, saturated with specific associations and ordered according to particular principles. Zasetsky is 'overjoyed' when he recognises Lenin's 'familiar face' (referred to in the Russian text by the affectionate diminutive *Ilichka*).⁶⁰ He subsequently recalls words like sun, moon, cloud and rain, as well as his own name and the names of his family members. This implies that the image of Lenin is as taken for granted and familiar as the weather. In the period of the First Five Year Plan Luria's experiments in Central Asia indicated that far from all Soviet citizens were able to recognise Lenin's face. By the time of the Second World War, however,

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Central Park*, trans. by Lloyd Spencer and Mark Harrington, *New German Critique*, 34 (1985), 32-58, p. 34.

⁵⁹ The phrase 'return to life' ['*vernut'sya k zhizni*?'] appears in the Russian text. Luria, *Romantcheskie Esse*, p. 118.

the newly introduced culture had become an embedded part of people's lives and consciousnesses; it had congealed into Second Nature.⁶¹

Zasetsky is clear that his injury makes him feel useless not only in terms of his personal life, but also in relation to the life of his country. The narrative he produced, which he originally intended to give the title *I'll Fight On!*, is pervaded by militaristic vocabulary. This is even more pronounced in the Russian text: certain passages, which underline and repeat the militaristic tropes, are omitted from the English translation altogether. For instance, in the opening passages of the Russian text Luria introduces the case history by declaring: 'It is about a fight that did not lead to victory [*pobeda*], and about a victory that has not put an end to fighting.'⁶² The loss Zasetsky feels is associated with patriotic feeling. He expresses concern that he is no longer 'of some service to his country' (the Russian word '*narod*', conventionally translated as nation or motherland, has an even more fervently patriotic emphasis).⁶³ The English translation also tends to omit the possessive pronoun 'our', which litters the Russian text, indicating the close identification Zasetsky feels with his nation. When presented with a copy of the daily newspaper, he is horrified to discover that he is unable to recognise 'our Pravda', later bemoaning the unfamiliarity of 'our Russian words.'⁶⁴ It is not language in general that provides his 'link with life' but a particular language, bound up with his Soviet identity and history. His sense of despair partly derives from a feeling of disaffiliation. The specifically Soviet qualities of text are also reflected in its form, which mimics Zasetsky's struggle to re-connect with his former self.

A World Shattered and Re-Made: Between Spontaneity and Consciousness

⁶⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 64, *Romanticheskije Esse [Romantic Essays]* (Moscow; Pedagogika, 1996), p. 154.

⁶¹ Serguei Alex Oushakine uses Luria's case history to illustrate a similar point, in the context of a discussion of post-Soviet nostalgia for the fallen regime, using Zasetsky's condition as a metaphor for understanding the relation to the now defunct vocabularies of state socialism. See, Serguei Alex Oushakine, "'We're Nostalgic but We're Not Crazy": Retrofitting the past in Russia', *Russian Review*, 66, 3 (2007), 451-482.

⁶² Luria, *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 105. In Russian, the word '*pobeda*' is also a short-hand term to refer to Soviet victory in the Second World War. A similar sentence appears at the end of the Russian text (immediately preceding the epilogue) that is also omitted from the English (Compare, *Shattered*, p. 159 and *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 232). Compare also, *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 118 with *Shattered*, p. 17 which omits a short paragraph describing Zasetsky's 'difficult struggle'.

⁶³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 35 and Luria *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 131.

Oliver Sacks conceives of case histories, or what he calls 'Clinical Tales', as narratives that strive to reorient the self in a world experienced as broken; they are concerned with 'organisation and chaos, order and disorder'.⁶⁵ Zasetky framed his struggle in similar terms, as an attempt to make 'the bits and pieces to add up to a coherent whole'.⁶⁶ This is also captured by the Russian title of the case history: *A World Lost and Re-Gained* [*Poteryannyi i vozvrashchennyi mir*]. For Sacks, a clinical tale aims to describe the relation of the patient's altered world to 'our world'.⁶⁷ But whose world is 'ours'? Notions of chaos and disorder rely on a conception of organisation and order, but such apparently stable entities are historically contingent. As we have seen, Zasetky's world was ordered in a particular way that was partially determined by his national context. The worlds Sacks and Luria attempted to reintegrate their patients back into were ordered differently, and so too were the narrative styles they employed to convey their patients' conditions.

Luria was an avid reader of detective novels. Oliver Sacks and Jerome Bruner recall that they were both implored to supply him with works by American crime writers including Ngaio Marsh and Nicholas Freeling. Sacks recalls that Luria's favourite Sherlock Holmes book was the *Seven Percent Solution*, in which a cocaine addicted Holmes is in analysis with Freud.⁶⁸ Luria explicitly likened the role of the psychologist to that of a 'criminal investigator'.⁶⁹ Indeed, his experiments with criminals that formed the basis of his 1932 book *The Nature of Human Conflicts* (discussed in Chapter 1) saw him working directly with the police. In an essay analysing popular detective fiction, 'The Hotel Lobby' (1925), Siegfried Kracauer claims that both the detective and the detective novel seek to 'construct a

⁶⁴ See, Luria *Romanticheskije Esse* p. 154. In the English text 'our newspaper Pravda' is translated as 'Pravda' and 'our Russian words' as 'words'. Luria, *Shattered*, p. 64.

⁶⁵ Oliver Sacks, 'Clinical Tales', *Literature and Medicine*, 5 (1986), 16-23, p. 18. For a persuasive critique of this kind of argument, see, Angela Woods, 'The Limits of Narrative: Provocations for the Medical Humanities', *Medical Humanities*, 37, 2 (2011), 73-78, p. 74.

⁶⁶ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xxi.

⁶⁷ Sacks, 'Clinical Tales', p. 18.

⁶⁸ Michael Cole, Jerome Bruner, and Oliver Sacks, 'A Dialogue about Alexander Luria', *Dubna Psyanima Journal*, 1 (2013), 41-49.

⁶⁹ K.E. Levintin, 'The Soul's Frail Dwelling House', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 5, 36 (1998), 23-45, p. 27.

whole out of the blindly scattered elements of a disintegrated world'.⁷⁰ Luria's case history set out to perform a similar task. However, Kracauer also analyses the detective novel as a product of mass culture that provides clues to the mysteries of the particular society that produced it. As he observes in 'The Mass Ornament' (1927):

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself.⁷¹

Kracauer declares that the detective novel 'discloses the secret of a society bereft of reality.'⁷² He sees the alienation of capitalist society reflected in this genre of popular fiction. Kracauer discusses the hotel lobby as the location that defines detective fiction – a space illuminated by harsh artificial light, and inhabited by spectral, disconnected figures whose apathy and inertia might be linked to Malabou's characterisation of the 'new wounded', which she also explicitly characterises as a distinctly capitalist form of subjectivity.⁷³ Luria's international contacts and ability to read in English gave him access to popular Western fiction but this was not a literary genre that had a mass readership in the Soviet Union.⁷⁴ The dialectical tension between woundedness and healing that animates *The Man with a Shattered World* bears much closer resemblance to a popular literary genre remote from American detective fiction: the socialist realist novel. Kracauer's approach to the products of mass culture might be usefully transposed into the Soviet context: attending to the surface of Luria's text provides insights into the epoch and society of which it was a product.

Socialist realism was installed as the official literature of the Soviet Union following the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, the year of Vygotsky's death. The term itself had been in circulation for a couple of years already, and the condemnation of Freudianism, Formalism and modernism were already taken for granted when the conference began. Katerina Clark discusses the socialist realist

⁷⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Hotel Lobby' in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. by Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 173-188, p. 175.

⁷¹ Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' in *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 75-86, p. 75.

⁷² Siegfried Kracauer, 'Hotel Lobby', p. 175.

⁷³ See, particularly, Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*

novel as a form of ritual, understood as a cultural form and social act through which cultural meaning and national myths were generated, consolidated and sustained. Socialist realist novels follow a distinct master plot, whose formula, she argues, remained remarkably consistent from the 1930s through to the Brezhnev era, with even illegally circulated *samizdat* literature tending to conform to the officially established structure. The Soviet novel's master plot was, she argues, 'the literary expression of the master categories that organise the entire culture.'⁷⁵ As Jochen Hellbeck discusses in his analysis of Soviet diarists, *Revolution on My Mind*, a broadly Leninist understanding of society's progression towards communism and the individual's place in that struggle also structured Soviet citizen's private reflections: 'To truly live meant to rise above selfish pursuits and devote one's life to society and history, to remake accursed, backward Russia through the power of personal example and an unflinching orientation toward the future.'⁷⁶ Zasetky's accounts of his illness are consistent with Hellbeck's characterisation of Soviet diary-writers: writing was framed as an arduous pursuit which functioned as a space for self-interrogation, where the lonely and inadequate individual strove to overcome their personal deficiencies in order to merge with the collective.

According to Clark, the hero of the socialist realist novel embodies the Marxist-Leninist account of history. The questing protagonist undergoes a transformation, which Clark characterises as a working out of the dialectic between spontaneity and consciousness (the movement famously described by Lenin in *What is to be Done?*, discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Despite being intemperate and chaotic, for Lenin, spontaneity is a prerequisite for the progression towards

⁷⁴ On the fate of detective fiction in the Soviet Union, see Natalia Ilyina and Arkadi Adamov, 'Detective Novels: A Game of Life', *Soviet Literature*, 3 (1975) 142-50. Robert Russell, 'Red Pinkertonism: An Aspect of Soviet Literature of the 1920s,' *SEER*, 60 (1982), 390-412.

⁷⁵ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, IL; University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 14. Irina Gutkin similarly discusses the 'homogeneity of cliched language' employed within Soviet literature, a system which created a 'system of linguistic bondage' in which '[e]very word is firmly bonded, spatially and temporally, to ideological tenets.' Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Chicago; Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 68-69.

⁷⁶ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 362-363. Sean Guillory's analysis of first-hand accounts of the Civil War suggests that the ideological narratives of the state were less prevalent in this early period. Instead, he argues that these memoirs reveal: 'confusion, personal loss, hardship, physical suffering, and fear in the face of death.' Sean Guillory, 'The Shattered Self of Komsomol Civil War Memoirs', *Slavic Review*, 71, 3 (2012), 546-565, p. 547.

communism. The movement from spontaneity to consciousness is a progression from chaotic resistance to organised revolutionary struggle. In Clark's account, this movement had a counterpart in the socialist realist hero:

The great historical drama of struggle between the forces of spontaneity and the forces of consciousness is unfolded in a tale of the way one individual mastered his wilful self, became disciplined, and attained to an extrapersonal identity [...] the hero achieved greater harmony within himself and in relation to his society.⁷⁷

The Man with a Shattered World overwhelmingly corresponds to the master plot of the socialist realist novel. The case history describes a heroic man - Luria explicitly describes him as such throughout⁷⁸ - struggling with almost superhuman effort and determinacy to overcome his own infirmity. Zasetsky is committed to overcoming chaos and re-establishing the order of his broken life in order 'to impose some order and sense of continuity.'⁷⁹ 'This book,' Luria asserts in a passage omitted from the English translation, 'is about a heroic struggle for life'.⁸⁰ Nature often appears as the antagonist in socialist realist narratives - dam building, farm collectivising and factory constructing in hostile environments all feature prominently in novels of the genre. For Zasetsky, however, the nature being overcome is not external but internal; Zasetsky is at war with his own brain.

Lilya Kaganovsky identifies two conflicting yet coexisting images of masculinity operating within Stalinist culture: the healthy, virile, strong figure familiar from socialism realist statues and paintings, and the damaged, scarred and mutilated male body that appeared in cinematic and literary works of the period. She sees superimposed over the image of 'extravagant virility' presented in the visual arts, the heroic invalid - 'limping, bandaged, bedridden, grounded, unwilling or unable to marry' - a staple archetype in Soviet literature and film which punctures the

⁷⁷ Clark, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁸ Although the English text does describe Zasetsky as a hero, this aspect of Luria's narrative style is far more pronounced in the Russian text. Compare, for example, Luria, *Romanticheskije Esse* (pp. 105-106) in which the words 'hero' or 'heroic' appear seven times but only once in the English (Luria, *Shattered*, p. 15). At a later point 'our hero' (Luria, *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 231) is translated simply as 'this man' (Luria, *Shattered*, p. 157).

⁷⁹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xix.

⁸⁰ Luria, *Romanticheskije Esse*, p. 105.

idealised image of masculinity:⁸¹ 'The heroic invalid *is* the exemplary Stalinist subject.'⁸² Zasetsky conforms to this archetype.

Kaganovsky reads the coexistence of these conflicting images of masculinity in psychoanalytic terms, as a fantasy of 'radical dismemberment', representing the fundamental gap between real and ideal gender norms.⁸³ She frames this in Lacanian vocabulary: her heroes live with lack, staging the incommensurability of penis and phallus. But the gap between ideal and reality is not simply a question of gender as Kaganovsky implies; it is precisely what animated the experience of building socialism. Unlike nineteenth-century realism, socialist realism was not strictly mimetic; it was not concerned with simply depicting the present as it really was. Socialist realism was never intended as a mirror of the present but more like a window into the future, juxtaposing an idealised image of current existence with a prefiguration of the bright communist world to come. Régine Robin characterises socialist realism as an 'impossible aesthetic' whose impossibility derives from the fundamental incompatibility she discerns between the conflicting temporalities at work within socialist realist narratives, which she describes as 'the impossible inscription of the description-prescription oxymoron.'⁸⁴ From this tension between the what-is and the what-ought-to-be, the narrative derives its relentless forward-moving drive; the novel is always dynamic, with an emphasis on the ongoing struggle to build communism, to bring a new reality into being. The fantasy (future) of unity and reconciliation is combined with the reality (present) of dismemberment. Radical dismemberments paradoxically propel the hero forwards; he strives to overcome the obstacles in the external world as well as those presented by his own body.

⁸¹ Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, PA; University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), p. 3. On masculinity and the Soviet experience of the Second World War, see: Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York, NY; Metropolitan Books, 2006).

⁸² Kaganovsky, p. 129. Interestingly, Jacyna notes that the archetypal aphasic person is also male, *Lost Words*, p. 7.

⁸³ Kaganovsky, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Palo Alto, CA; Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 297. Clark describes this phenomenon as 'modal schizophrenia', p. 38. Gutkin glosses it in the following terms: 'The socialist realist chronotope projected into mass consciousness the dichotomous myth of the beautiful ideal future and the already beautiful present', p. 80.

The most striking parallel with *The Man with the Shattered World* is Nikolai Ostrovsky's prototypical *How the Steel was Tempered*, first published in serial form between 1932 and 1934, just prior to the 1934 Soviet Writer's Congress. The novel tells the story of revolutionary hero Pavel Korchagin who joins the Red Army during the Civil War, tracing the young hero's progress from passive individual to collective subject. Pavel is severely injured in battle but his disability does nothing to quell his revolutionary fervour. At the end of the novel, though bedridden and blind, Pavel remains 'determined to resume his place in the ranks of the builders of the new life.'⁸⁵ Like Zasetky, he does this by writing an account of his struggles. The novel concludes when he receives a telegram from Leningrad confirming that his work will be published, returning him 'to the fighting ranks and to life.'⁸⁶ Zasetky's writing plays a similar role and he expresses himself in the embattled vocabulary of the socialist realist hero: 'I'm fighting to recover a life I lost when I was wounded.'⁸⁷ In both cases the text, the process of writing and the writing subject cannot be disentangled. Ostrovsky's own life famously paralleled that of his mutilated hero. The novel's torturous composition formed an integral part of its symbolic status, elevating writing to a heroic and revolutionary act.⁸⁸ Zasetky attempted to achieve consciousness through writing, and the case history bears witness to the strenuous therapeutic process of which it is a product.

The Writing Cure

Psychoanalysis is a talking cure; the treatment proceeds through a peculiar form of conversation in the consulting room, configured by temporal and monetary constraints. Friedrich Kittler argues that the psychoanalytic encounter should be understood as a 'pure realm of hearing'.⁸⁹ According to Kittler, psychoanalysis has 'no vague parallels to film; it has much more precisely learned the lesson of

⁸⁵ Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How the Steel was Tempered*, vol. 2, trans. R. Prokofieva (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), p. 375.

⁸⁶ Ostrovsky, p. 382.

⁸⁷ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ See, Semen Adol'fovich Tregub, *The Heroic Life of Nikolai Ostrovsky* (Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957).

⁸⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 284. Sander Gilman makes a similar observation. See, Sander Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (New York, John Wiley, 1982), p. 223.

technological sound recorders',⁹⁰ which originated 'not coincidentally' at the same time.⁹¹ In both *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* Kittler quotes Freud's 'Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psychoanalysis' (1912) in which the analyst is likened to a telephone receiver adjusted to the transmitting microphone of the analysand: 'mouths and ears have become electrotransducers'.⁹² The telephone does not prioritise certain sounds over others; it does not separate sense from nonsense, indeed these categories do not exist for it at all. The catch though, as Kittler is quick to point out, is that Freud's telephone analogy is just that: an analogy rather than a telephone. Just as images are transposed into words in the interpretation of a dream, so the acoustical data of the consulting room is not recorded by a machine but listened to by a human-all-too-human analyst who transforms the material of the session into written words from memory: 'This is the relation between analytic practice and theory. What would have disturbed free-floating attention during the session later occurs after all: Freud reaches for his pen'.⁹³ Freud did not even take notes during analytic sessions, but relied on his memory, as he notes in 'Dora' (1905): 'the record is not absolutely – phonographically – exact'.⁹⁴ Whereas the phonograph records noises 'regardless of their so-called meaning',⁹⁵ writing, even if it selects nonsense, always selects. Kittler's critique of the psychoanalytic method is grounded in a concern with the transformations and distortions that occur when one medium (speech) is transposed into another (writing).

Kittler's discussion is primarily concerned with how the written case history is produced, but a body of feminist secondary literature on the Freudian case history has focused on the issue of who produced the writing, and attempted to redress the imbalance between writing analyst and speaking analysand by reinserting the analysand's voice into the history of the case.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, Malabou

⁹⁰ Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p. 284.

⁹¹ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA; Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 37.

⁹² Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p. 284.

⁹³ Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p. 285.

⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' ['Dora'], *Standard Edition*, vol. 7 (London; Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 3-124, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 85.

⁹⁶ See, for example: Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, *Freud's Women* (New York, NY; BasicBooks, 1992), *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer and

accuses Luria of muffling his patient's experience by smothering it with his own written account. She claims Luria falsely imposes clarity on his fragmented patient: 'narrative work is a clinical gesture.'⁹⁷ Unlike Freud's case histories, which transpose one medium into another, however, Luria composed his case history from texts written by Zasetzky, the composition of which was central to the therapeutic process. Following Kittler's argument, by operating within the same medium as his patient, Luria's method could be said to present his patient in a less mediated (though certainly not unmediated) fashion. Although the patient's experience is still framed by the neurologist, his words are represented in the case history in a way that the psychoanalytic method precludes.

Kittler extends his discussion of the limitations of the human analyst by pointing to the failure of the written case history to capture the 'white noise' of free association; for imposing order on chaos. Free association is characterised by a lack of calculation, of organisation, of coherence; the analysand is encouraged to relate whatever is on the 'surface' of their mind however meaningless, trivial or absurd-seeming.⁹⁸ In producing a case history, the analyst alone is responsible for reproducing the unruly utterances (and silences) of the analysand. Luria's techniques and goals were very different from free association as he emphasised the voluntary over the involuntary. Luria encouraged Zasetzky (who, unlike the subjects of Freud's case histories, was not given a pseudonym) to use writing to reorder his own broken life. In the opening pages of the case history he explicitly declares that Zasetzky should be considered book's author: 'It is not false modesty on my part to wish no credit for this book. The real author is its hero.'⁹⁹ It is not the doctor but the patient who takes responsibility for piecing things back together, inserting shards of memory into a coherent narrative: 'His only material consisted of fragmentary recollections

Claire Kahne (New York, NY; Columbia University Press, 1985) and Hannah S. Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1991). See also, H el ene Cixous, 'Portrait of Dora', trans. by Anita Barrows, *Gambit International Theatre Review*, 8, 30 (1977), pp. 27-67, p. 54.

⁹⁷ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 54. L.S. Jacyna similarly discusses the status of the aphasic subject in scientific case histories, concluding that historically such subjects had a 'lack of power to influence the acts of representation within which they were entwined.' See, Jacyna, p. 6.

⁹⁸ For a definition of free association and its pre-psychoanalytic origins, see J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Daniel Nicholson-Smith (London; Karnac Books, 1988), pp. 169-170.

⁹⁹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xix.

that came to mind at random. On these he had to impose some order and sense of continuity.’¹⁰⁰

In his autobiography, Luria explains that he frequently employed writing as a form of therapy with brain injured patients. Initially, he claimed that his patients experienced their memories as ‘pieces of a jigsaw puzzle piled up haphazardly’ before them.¹⁰¹ Luria devised a writing exercise to assist these people in completing the puzzle. The patient would write down ‘the fragments of narration they remember on separate pieces of paper’, lay the pieces in front of them and rearrange them into a ‘coherent order.’¹⁰² Using similar methods, writing provided Zasetzky with his only ‘link with life, his only hope of not succumbing to illness but recovering at least part of what had been lost.’¹⁰³ Re-mastering his lost language allowed Zasetzky to re-connect to humanity. Writing acted as a mediator between patient and world; the process of composing narratives was used to weave the frayed strands of his life back into the fabric of society. Writing was crucial to the therapeutic process, rather than an act performed by the psychologist *post factum*. Furthermore, in contrast to the analysand who reclines on the couch as a means of encouraging the relaxation necessary for free association, Luria describes Zasetzky's process of writing as a laborious and deliberate pursuit. Initially, Zasetzky cannot even remember how to use a pencil or form letters on a page. Although he gradually remastered the ability to write, producing words remained torturously difficult: ‘every word he recalled, every thought he expressed, required the most excruciating effort. When his writing went well, he managed to write a page a day, two at most, and felt completely drained by this.’¹⁰⁴ Yet it was this constant battle with linguistic expression that gave Zasetzky’s life meaning: ‘This work caused him no end of despair, but the hope that had impelled him to write carried him along.’¹⁰⁵

The frenzied approach Zasetzky took to writing, the fervent application that the case history returns to throughout, does not, however, succeed in producing a neatly ordered document:

¹⁰⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xx.

¹⁰¹ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 153.

¹⁰² Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xx.

¹⁰⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xx.

I tried to remember whatever I could with that battered memory of mine and write it as a true story, just as a writer would. But when I started I realised I'd never be able to do that since I didn't have enough of a vocabulary or mind left to write well.¹⁰⁶

Luria based *The Man with a Shattered World* on three thousand pages of written notes composed by Zasetzky over a period of over twenty five years. He evocatively describes the material output yielded by the therapeutic process: 'Before me is a pile of notebooks: some of them faded, makeshift affairs dating from the war years; others, thick, oilcloth-covered books covering the recent past.'¹⁰⁷ Although the transformation that occurred in turning this raw material into a case history may not be strictly analagous to the process of composing a psychoanalytic case history, which relies on the analyst's memories of the spoken analytic encounter, it was still Luria who edited, arranged and commented upon the huge unwieldy mass of written material Zasetzky produced. Unlike in a psychoanalytic consulting room the therapist encouraged his patient to order his thoughts, but this nonetheless proved impossible. Indeed, Zasetzky was only capable of writing automatically, 'without thinking', which suggests that his method of producing words was not as remote from free association as his descriptions of his intense application to the task imply.¹⁰⁸ Zasetzky might have been driven to heal, to restore himself to the world, but the vast accumulation of notes that he produced suggest that his efforts were always undercut by the impossibility of doing so: 'I'd try to dig up another idea and find suitable words for it, and I'd write these down on various scraps of paper... what a torture it was.'¹⁰⁹ He forgot the most simple words, produced 'disjointed phrases' and found re-reading his own words extremely difficult.¹¹⁰ In the pursuit of making sense of his life, Zasetzky piles words on words, pages upon pages, notebooks upon notebooks. Ultimately, for all its strenuous exertions to pull the disparate pieces together, the work and the patient it describes remain in pieces:

I wanted terribly to write this story but I worked so hard at it, I finally felt sick - both from my head wound and the endless job of writing about it. It's been an enormous strain (still is). I work at it like someone with an obsession.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xix.

¹⁰⁸ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 79-80.

¹¹⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 78.

¹¹¹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 81.

In 'Dora' Freud claims that an analysand's initial account of their experiences 'may be compared to an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sandbanks [...] leaving gaps unfilled, riddles unanswered.'¹¹² It is only by the end of the treatment that 'an intelligible, consistent and unbroken case history' will emerge.¹¹³ Freud, however, is quick to undermine this claim. The case history is, after all, entitled 'Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' and his patient cut off her analysis. Luria, like Freud, is incapable of replacing the unnavigable river with a straight canal (a conclusion no socialist realist novel would tolerate). Rather than condemning Luria's case history, as Malabou does, for failing to communicate the peculiar qualities of his patient's condition, however, the text does not completely banish the unruly quality of his patient's writings. The text might not be a transparent representation of Zasetzky's condition but its fragmented form bears witness to the relationship between the patient and his doctor, and between Zasetzky's present experiences and imagined healthy future. The gesture of ordering the material into a case history mimics the structure of the treatment, and ultimately the fragmentary, non-linear structure of the former, does justice to the unfinished, interminable quality of the latter.

Returning once more to the form of the text, it is possible to discern moments in which the forward moving progressive thrust of the socialist realist narrative is undermined by Zasetzky's constant digressions and regressions. Luria's contemporary, the Soviet literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, argued that language is always internally split.¹¹⁴ He acknowledged that language is 'ideologically saturated',¹¹⁵ claiming that the apparently rigid structures of what he calls 'unitary language' always operate in the midst of heteroglossia; a tendency to unite is constantly undermined by a tendency to disassemble. The unitary language and

¹¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Dora', p. 16.

¹¹³ Freud, 'Dora', p. 18

¹¹⁴ On overlaps between Bakhtin's ideas and Vygotsky's and personal connections within the Soviet intelligentsia, see, Caryl Emerson, 'The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language', *Critical Inquiry*, 10, 2 (1983), 245-264 and Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London; Pluto Press, 2002).

¹¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX; University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 271.

heteroglossia are in constant interaction - the former imposing limits, tending towards stasis and ossification, the latter always fighting to resist these constraints. The unitary language is centripetal, it keeps the language moving uniformly along a prescribed path, heteroglossia is centrifugal, it has a decentralising tendency. For Bakhtin, every utterance is 'a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language.'¹¹⁶ The contradictory qualities of language described by Bakhtin, recall the movement traced in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which Eros or the life instincts draw things together while the death drive pulls them apart. These contradictions and tensions animate *The Man with a Shattered World*. Zastetsky's injury produced linguistic and perceptual disturbances that the treatment attempted to overcome. Zastetsky sought to reintegrate into the existing world from which his injury excluded him, a process the case history formally and linguistically mimics. Ultimately, however, Zastetsky is operating within a particular ideologically saturated discourse that the condition being described refuses to be fully contained by. The specificities of the cerebral condition of the patient crack open the official unitary language with its emphasis on wholeness and resolution. Heteroglossia intrudes, unravelling the centripetal qualities of the text's socialist realist unitary language.

The Man with the Shattered Brain: The History of a World Wound

Malabou challenges the assumption that narrative can function to reunite wounded people with their former selves. Instead she asks: 'What mirror could reflect a brain?'¹¹⁷ Although she insists that the 'new wounded' cannot be healed, she does suggest that their experience of total detachment could be represented. Luria's case history, Malabou argues, fails to do justice to the 'rupture of narrativity' that she assumes characterises the psychic condition of the patient being described.¹¹⁸ Instead, she identifies Samuel Beckett's 'theatre of absence' as the literary form most capable of representing the 'affective impoverishment and destructive metamorphosis' that she insists is characteristic of the new wounded.¹¹⁹ Beckett's writings, she claims, are uniquely capable of capturing the 'blank spaces that emerge

¹¹⁶ Bakhtin, p. 272.

¹¹⁷ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

¹¹⁸ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

when the network of connections is shredded'.¹²⁰ Malabou proposes that Beckett's work might be suited to conveying the subjectivity of the new wounded because of its 'interruption, pauses, caesuras'.¹²¹ In practice, however, her analysis focuses on content rather than form; she is more concerned with the kind of subjects she claims Beckett describes, than in his use of language *per se*. For example, she draws heavily on the recent work of Antonio Damasio, favourably remarking upon his predilection for Beckett, without pausing to consider the literary form Damasio employs, in which the matter-of-fact voice of the doctor takes precedence over those of his patients in a far more pronounced way than in Luria's case history, where the first person perspective switches between doctor and patient. The subjects Damasio describes may conform to Malabou's singular definition of the 'new wounded' but she does not ask why the narrative style of his case histories, which are written in continuous prose without interruptions, pauses or caesuras, bears no trace of his professed literary influences.¹²²

Unlike Damasio's cases, *The Man with A Shattered World* proceeds in a jerky, jolted fashion. Though concerned with establishing unity and coherence, Luria does not present the wounded subject as already healed nor is the text unified and coherent. Luria employs two interweaving narrative voices, switches between various tenses and genres, and jumps backwards and forwards in time in order to mimic the patient's non-linear experience. By relying on large chunks of first-person testimony, it is written from the perspective of terrified disorientation, as felt by Zasetzky:

When I came out of the bathroom, I forgot which way I had to turn to get back to my room. So I just started walking, dragging myself along. Suddenly I banged my side against the door [...] I was amazed that this had happened [...] I turned in the other direction and fell, because I got confused again and didn't know which way to walk. Suddenly the words right, left, back, forward, up, and down occurred to me, but they weren't any help since I didn't really understand what they meant.¹²³

The book is full of surreal and bewildering passages that might indeed come from

¹¹⁹ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

¹²⁰ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

¹²¹ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 55.

¹²² For examples of Damasio's case histories, see: Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of what Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London; Harcourt, 1999).

¹²³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 53.

the pages of Beckett: spoons appear as 'peculiar bits of space',¹²⁴ familiar towns become alien labyrinths, heads might become as large as tables one minute and as small as chicken heads the next, hands and legs vanish and must be 'hunted' for, and written language appears as a mysterious series of squiggles. Zasetzky sees everything as though through a swarm of tiny flies (Plate 4.2). Luria writes: 'the objects he saw no longer appeared stable. They would glimmer fitfully and become displaced, making everything appear as if it were in a state of flux.'¹²⁵ Words appear as though they had been 'gnawed, plucked around the edges, and what's left are scattered points, quills, or threads that flicker like a swarm'.¹²⁶ Objects confront him as completely mysterious, 'alien, colourless and fragmented.'¹²⁷ For Zasetzky, vision takes on a monstrous life of its own; it not only obscures reality but is actively nibbling away at it, wearing it down: 'I see only a grey mist in which spots, threads, and little bodies seem to shift and flicker back and forth.'¹²⁸

Immediately after re-gaining consciousness Luria describes asking his patient to recount the moment of his injury: "Well, you see... it's, it's... a long time already... must be two, three.. What's the word?..."¹²⁹ This last question, as Laura Salisbury discusses, recalls Beckett's final work 'What Is The Word', written after its author suffered a stroke that resulted in temporary aphasia. Salisbury describes a work 'scattered with stuttered dashes, abrupt elisions, compulsive repetitions and controlled echoes that inhabit an uncanny hinterland between the voluntary and the involuntary.'¹³⁰ Unlike Beckett, Luria attempted to overcome the disruptions. Writing had a therapeutic function, providing Zasetzky with a means to reorient himself in a world experienced as broken. Nonetheless, despite the efforts of its authors, *The Man with a Shattered World* also evokes an uncanny hinterland between voluntary and involuntary; the dialectic between woundedness and healing is never fully resolved.

¹²⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 37.

¹²⁵ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 38.

¹²⁶ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 38.

¹²⁷ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 99.

¹²⁸ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 17.

¹³⁰ Laura Salisbury, "What Is the Word": Beckett's Aphasic Modernism', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 17 (2008), 79-128, p. 79. Salisbury also engages with Luria's case history, contrasting Zasetzky's attempt to gain 'a victory over his aphasia [...] the rediscovery of a sense of self-cohesion, self-awareness and purposive subjectivity' with Beckett's less triumphant final text (p. 80).

The text is riven with breaks that correspond to gaps in Zasetsky's memory. Contrary to Malabou's criticisms, Luria's translator claims that 'Luria has scrupulously preserved the repetitions and inconsistencies which are symptoms of the patient's condition.'¹³¹ Elisions punctuate the description of his last memories before being wounded: 'Under fire, I jumped up from the ice, pushed on...toward the west...there...and...'¹³² Luria also reproduces the pauses and non-sequiturs that dotted Zasetsky's speech. In its form this recalls Gilles Deleuze's discussion of Beckett's writing, which he describes by way of a neurological metaphor (borrowed from Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun):¹³³ 'Beckett clamours for a style that would proceed through a perforation and proliferation of tissue.'¹³⁴ Malabou briefly mentions Deleuze's characterisation of Beckett as a writer of exhaustion without noting that in Deleuze's discussion the exercise of exhausting the possible in Beckett's writing (achieved through exhaustive combinations of words) does not result in the kind of barren qualities she associates with the 'new wounded' at all. Instead, Deleuze argues, foregrounding the strangeness of language allows for a kind of desubjectivised affect to seep back into Beckett's texts. Drilling through language results in a wound. The problem with words, Deleuze claims, is that they are overburdened by habit, memory and history: 'their surface, barely broken, heals over again.'¹³⁵ The implication is that the total devastation - the 'absence of persistence, of revivification, or of regression'¹³⁶ - Malabou claims is embodied in Beckett's writing was never achieved. His writing captures a tension between woundedness and healing, rather than embodying the unhealable wound itself. *The Man with a Shattered World* contains a similar tension between the habitual skin of the world and the wound that tears through its surface. Zasetsky's condition precludes him from participating in routine social activities: working, shopping, conversing, finding his way around. Once familiar words become strange and opaque; the surface does not heal. The impossible, the unreality of reality, thus erupts into view: 'words burst and backfire on themselves to reveal their own outside.'¹³⁷

¹³¹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 11.

¹³² Luria, *Shattered*, p. 8.

¹³³ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, vol. 1, 1929-1940*, ed. by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbook (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 518.

¹³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', *Substance*, 24, 3 (1995), 3-28, p. 22.

¹³⁵ Deleuze, p. 22.

¹³⁶ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 56.

It is precisely these moments, in which routine existence is revealed as strange and arduous, that Beckett discerns in Proust's work: 'the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.'¹³⁸ *The Man with a Shattered World* inhabits such a perilous zone. Rebecca Comay characterises Proust's project as one of endless accumulation, which the author pursued with an obsessiveness bordering on the pathological. She compares his habit of scrupulously recording his experience of illness to Beckett's description of Molloy's farts:

The involuntary processes of the body are registered in the archive of the voluntary memory until the very act of accounting is transformed into a kind of spiritual exercise—a running litany of complaints from which emerges at once both the possibility and the impossibility of writing.¹³⁹

Comay invokes Benjamin's discussion of the interaction of memory and forgetting in Proust which he likens to Penelope's shroud; every weaving is an unweaving.¹⁴⁰ In *The Origin of Tragic Drama* Benjamin describes the search for origins as being animated by a similarly dialectical rhythm. For Benjamin, any discussion of origins must also contend with subsequent history: 'That which is original [...] needs to be recognised as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete.'¹⁴¹ This dual movement also animates *The Man with a Shattered World*; though aimed at restoration the process remains incomplete. Although Luria's case history functions as an attempt, performed by both doctor and patient, to tame the unruly profusion, obtrusion and confusion of words wrought by Zassetsky's injury, ultimately, it is not his recovery that determines his being, but his determination to recover:

He was acutely aware of what it means to be human, and to the extent that his strength permitted, worked feverishly to overcome his problems. He suffered

¹³⁷ Deleuze, p. 22. This is also strikingly similar to Viktor Shklovsky's analysis of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In his famous 1917 essay 'Art as Device', Shklovsky declares that Tolstoy's prose style 'estranges' objects in order to fully apprehend their significance: 'He [Tolstoy] does not call a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time.' Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Device' in *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (London; Dalkey, 1991), pp. 1-14, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York, NY; Grove Press, 1957), p. 8.

¹³⁹ Rebecca Comay, 'Proust's Remains', *October*, 144 (2013), 3-24.

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin, 'On the Image of Proust', *Selected Works, vol. 2, 1927-1930*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 237-247, p. 238.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osbourne, (London; Verso, 2009), p. 45.

intensely, and though his world had been devastated, in the deepest sense he remained a man, struggling to regain what he had lost.¹⁴²

Zasetsky goes in search of lost time, only to find its scattered and splintered remnants cannot be neatly reassembled; it is the persistence of their sharp edges and rough textures that define him.

Clark maintains that socialist realism was not only a literary genre but a form of cultural ritual. Zasetsky's attempts to describe his life might similarly be understood as ritualistic. It is a ritual that is repeated compulsively. The beginning is constantly returned to, the steps of the journey retraced: 'I've repeated the same points over and over again in my story and may do it again'.¹⁴³ Like the movement of the death drive which is always impelled to return to the beginning, Zasetsky pushes forwards by moving back through his most distant past: 'My memories come back from the wrong end... my recollections mostly have to do with my childhood.'¹⁴⁴ This movement is mirrored by the structure of the case history itself, which not only recounts the treatment in a non-linear fashion, but also includes a series of scientific 'digressions' (the Russian term '*otstupleniye*' also means 'retreat'). Though the narrative of the case history is progressive, it constantly loops back on itself: 'I'm still caught in a vicious circle. I can't break out of it.'¹⁴⁵ These reversals and repetitions nonetheless propel the narrative forwards. Returning to the original site of disaster and to the happier times that preceded it, also gestures towards the possibility of re-writing history or at least recovering something that was lost there: 'In the beginning it was all so simple'.¹⁴⁶

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud described the child's game, which returned to the beginning over and over again. Fort/Da: the repetitive rhythm of the game represents an early attempt to gain mastery over the instincts. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Benjamin suggested that this discussion of repetition in play could also be understood as a 'reinstatement of the original condition.'¹⁴⁷ Politically, this implies the possibility of starting afresh, of renegotiating the course of events.

¹⁴² Luria, *Shattered*, p. 35.

¹⁴³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁵ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁶ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 3.

This possibility is central to Comay's understanding of memory, which she also relates to the temporality of the death drive:

Forgetting is not opposed to the work of remembrance [...] To forget to undo the past, to make it all "un-happen", is precisely to remember a moment before it all happened, to undo the inexorability of fate by re-staging the beginning, even if only in imagination and in proxy: to act *as if* we could take it over again, as if we could cast aside the legacy of dead generations, as if we could refuse the mourning work of cultural succession, as if we could cast off our patrimony, rewrite our origins, as if every moment, even those long vanished, could become a radically new beginning - unprecedented, unrehearsed, unremembered. This is why Freud will connect repetition with the death drive: the compulsion to repeat expresses a desire for inanimate existence and ultimately for non-existence: it is the desire to return to a time before the beginning—to go back not for the sake of regressing but in order to take it over, do it otherwise. The desire for repetition is essentially the desire for difference.¹⁴⁸

This understanding of repetition also indicates an understanding of recovery that is distinct from reintegration into an existing state of things. For Comay, Proust's drive to accumulate speaks of both anticipation and loss, it gestures towards the past as 'a constantly expanding repository of unrealised possibilities, botched initiatives, and thwarted hopes.'¹⁴⁹ The work of remembrance is therefore oriented towards the future; it returns to the past in order to recover and reactivate lost opportunities:

It is rather about returning to a time before possibilities were eroded, to a moment before opportunities were squandered: what is being reactivated or repeated is not only the pressure of unrealised futures but of futurity itself in its ineffaceable obduracy—a potentiality all the more potent for being irretrievably past. Benjamin speaks of "hope in the past."¹⁵⁰

In his furious writing and re-writing, weaving and unweaving Zazetsky returns again and again to the sites of squandered experiences, failure and lost chances, which are held in an unreconcilable tension with the violent actualities of subsequent history. It is precisely for this reason that *The Man With the Shattered World* emerges not only as a modernist document but also, obliquely, as a document of political hope.

¹⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Toys and Play' (1928) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 117-121, p. 120.

¹⁴⁸ Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 146-147.

¹⁴⁹ Comay 'Proust's Remains', p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Comay, 'Proust's Remains', p. 23. A similar argument animates Comay's work on Hegel: 'Possibility can appear only as a lost possibility, a lapsed possibility, a ruined possibility, even an impossibility, and the future as already passed...' Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 3. Comay aligns Proust's work with Benjamin and reads them both as thinkers of the future. This reading differs from that proposed by Peter Szondi in his more conventional analysis of the differences between Benjamin

Luria concludes by suggesting that Zasetzky ‘reverted to the past’ as a way of making sense of his experience in the present: ‘he could not understand why the world had become so peculiar, why war was necessary, or find any justification for what happened to him.’¹⁵¹ Zasetzky attempted to find a social justification for his condition, but he struggled to convince himself that his sacrifice had been worthwhile. Zasetzky seems to blame war for putting an end to the possibility for building a communist society: ‘were it not for war, the world would have become a great place to live long ago.’¹⁵² He asks poignantly: ‘What need is there for war, violence, slavery, oppression, murder, executions, poverty, hunger, back-breaking work, or unemployment in countries that have so much wealth?’¹⁵³ The Russian text explicitly says ‘in capitalist countries’ [‘v stranakh kapitala’] but the mistranslation is suggestive nonetheless, as Zasetzky was coming to terms with a shattered Soviet world which had also failed to banish most of the social ills he lists.¹⁵⁴ If, as Adorno powerfully argues in ‘Reconciliation Under Duress’ (discussed in detail below), ‘in countries where the decisive facts cannot be called by their proper names, the marks of the Terror are branded on everything that is uttered in their place,’¹⁵⁵ then perhaps *The Man with a Shattered World* could be read as a reflection on the failures of the revolutionary project, rather than solely on the devastating impact of war. After the famines and purges of the 1930s, the war allowed for the public expression of emotions that were previously suppressed. Popular culture emerged in the wake of the war that was, according to Richard Stites, ‘personal, loose, relaxed, earthy, coarse, natural, spontaneous, free, autonomous, expressive, honest about death and suffering and heroism and hate.’¹⁵⁶ Merridale argues that the war provided many Soviet citizens with an outlet for anger and sadness that had been completely stifled during the 1930s.¹⁵⁷ Talking about the horrors of war provided some respite from the silence about the Terror that had preceded it. The catastrophes that could not be

and Proust. See, Peter Szondi, ‘Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin,’ trans by Harvey Mendelsohn, *Critical Inquiry*, 4, 3 (1978), 491-506.

¹⁵¹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 158.

¹⁵² Luria, *Shattered*, p. 160.

¹⁵³ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁴ Luria, *Romantisheskie Esse*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁵ Adorno, ‘Reconciliation Under Duress’ in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Fredric Jameson, trans. by Ronald Taylor (London; New Left Books, 1977) pp. 151-176, p. 173.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Stites, ‘Russia’s Holy War’ in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Stites (Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 1-8, p. 4.

spoken of might in some sense be contained in the catastrophe of the war that is the explicit focus of the case history. Rather than looking to the officially ordained future of the socialist realist novel, *The Man with a Shattered World* returns to the past and in so doing opens up the possibility of thinking a different world. The case history documents Zasetzky's 'problems of coping with a world that seemed to have disintegrated.'¹⁵⁸ The problems he faced were, on the one hand, particular to his neurological condition,¹⁵⁹ but the feeling of disaffiliation and disappointment the case history expresses has a social and political resonance that transcends Zasetzky's specific struggle.

The closing passages of the case history are overwhelmingly optimistic:

In this age we have an opportunity to build and create a fine and beautiful world, to feed, clothe, and shelter all of mankind, not only the present generation but those for centuries to come. The water and earth of this world have an endless supply of energy and raw material, there is no need to fear any shortage of them. Soon there will be flights to outer space - first to the moon and the nearest planets. This will give us an even greater chance to enrich life with rare elements and substances that may be more plentiful on planets other than the earth.¹⁶⁰

In the English text this bombastic utopian statement is undercut by the threat of human violence. The epilogue concludes with the sombre acknowledgement: 'We could do this, were it not for war...'¹⁶¹ Zasetzky's confrontation with his own labyrinthine inner space undercuts the possibilities promised by visions of journeying into outer space. Both of these movements might be infinite, but instead of pushing outwards spatially into the uncharted cosmos, the text instead suggests that the future must be reached by way of a temporal movement back through history, which cannot banish the antagonisms of the past. The English version of the case history ends with an ellipsis rather a full-stop, suggesting that Zasetzky's struggle is on-going. The Russian text has a different ending, however. In the English version the authorial voices of Luria and Zasetzky merge, whereas in the Russian the closing statements reflecting on the future are attributed to Zasetzky, but

¹⁵⁷ Merridale, pp. 46-47.

¹⁵⁸ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁹ Zasetzky notes mournfully that 'the average person will never understand the extent of my illness.' Luria, *Shattered*, p. 158.

¹⁶⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 160. The Russian text contains a note explaining that Zasetzky had written this in 1957, two years before the first Soviet space mission (Luria, *Romanticheskie Esse*, p. 233).

¹⁶¹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 160.

the final sentence on war is omitted. Instead, Luria appends two concluding questions of his own: ‘Need we say anything else? Is not this line, full of optimism, the best possible end to this short book?’¹⁶² Again, by finishing with a question rather than a definitive statement, the ending remains open, but the Russian conclusion is more hopeful, suggesting that although the struggle to ‘build and create a fine and beautiful world’ may be continuous and arduous, it is not therefore futile; ‘we could do this’...

Monuments as Ruins: Between Modernism and Socialist Realism

Evgeny Dobrenko claims that one of the distinctive features of socialist realism was the ‘elusiveness of its boundaries’, arguing that socialist realist aesthetic forms were ‘engrafted’ onto Soviet consciousness with a thoroughness that gave shape to the Soviet experience and cannot therefore be confined to the realm of artistic production.¹⁶³ For Dobrenko, in the absence of real socialism, socialist realism was necessary to produce images of a transformed world. These images, he argues, eventually took on a reality of their own; socialism *was* socialist realism. That reality in the Soviet Union (whether it was really socialist or not) was never identical to a socialist realist artwork is of little concern to Dobrenko: ‘The fact that everything is imagined in this “reality” only emphasises the status of *construction* and *image* of reality in Soviet culture, that is, the status of the aesthetic’.¹⁶⁴ This chapter has attempted to make a different claim: that socialist realist narratives (which themselves conformed to Marxist-Leninist understandings of historical development) permeated and gave shape to Soviet experiences and expectations (and were therefore not external to reality), but that experiences and expectations nonetheless contradicted and exceeded those narratives. *The Man with a Shattered World* registers the discrepancy between socialist realism and Soviet reality rather than confirming their identity.

Unlike a socialist realist novel, Luria’s case history was forced to contend with the reality of the irreparable. The drama of the socialist realist novel is driven

¹⁶² Luria, *Romanticheskie Esse*, p. 234.

¹⁶³ Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. by Jesse M. Savage (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 2007), p. xiv.

by the hero's attempts to overcome obstacles and to sacrifice his private interests for the public good. Like Zasetsky, the ultimate goal of the socialist realist hero is social integration and the achievement of collective identity. As Hellbeck notes of Soviet diarists:

The enlarged life of the collective was seen as the true subjecthood. It promised vitality, historical meaning, and moral value, and it was intensely desired. By contrast, a life lived outside the collective or the flow of history carried a danger of personal regression stemming from the inability to participate in the forward-thrusting life of the Soviet people.¹⁶⁵

Kaganovsky discusses the 'trauma of returning home as unproductive and useless members of society', experienced by many veterans of the war.¹⁶⁶ Despite the presence of wounded heroes in Soviet fiction, disabled people, though numerous after the war, were not greeted as heroes but ostracised. Zasetsky's disability classification was downgraded in 1959, which exacerbated his recovery process by reducing his state benefits and declaring him fit to work.¹⁶⁷ Luria's colleague Karl Levitin explicitly reflected on the gap between Zasetsky's struggle and the image of heroism routinely presented by the Soviet press who eagerly, 'report on a well-driller who saved a rig from blowing up, or a construction worker who covered a hole in a dam with his body', but would be unlikely to discuss Zasetsky's internal conquering of material nature in the same terms.¹⁶⁸ Zasetsky noted mournfully: 'I'm aware just how abnormal I am when I talk to people.'¹⁶⁹ He compared his own plight to the preoccupations of Soviet discourse in a slightly different manner, noting: 'there is a good deal of talk now about the cosmos and outer space', but that interest in intergalactic flight detracted attention from a less grandiose kind of flight:

The flight of a bullet, or a shell or a bomb fragment, that rips open a man's skull, splitting and burning the tissues of the brain, crippling his memory, sight, hearing, awareness - these days people don't find anything extraordinary in that.¹⁷⁰

Though a rhetoric of unity and coherence reigned during and after the war, this

¹⁶⁴ Dobrenko, p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ Hellbeck, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Kaganovsky, p. 174. See also, Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: a Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁶⁷ K.E. Levitin, 'Confusion of Thought', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 36, 5 (1998), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Levitin, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. xxi.

disavowed the brutal devastation it wrought.

Esther Leslie blurs the neat line apparently separating modernism and realism, arguing that modernist art was not a rejection of reality, but a reaction to the new fractured realities of modernity:

Modern experience is fragmentary. We experience the world in bits and pieces because we are alienated, because the world and ourselves are split in multiple ways. Capitalist social relations prevent us being complete individuals. Modernist art, in re-mediating that fragmentariness, produces a historically authentic mirror of experience. To that extent, it is an art of the real.¹⁷¹

In response to Malabou's question - 'What mirror could reflect a brain?' - perhaps the mirror that could best reflect modern subjectivity is a broken one. Leslie asserts that socialist realism 'closed the door on the exchange between realism and modernism, in an epoch when the divisions hardened.'¹⁷² Despite the official silencing of these debates, however, these two apparently self-contained camps were always related to one another in complicated and contradictory ways. In the USSR, the connection was quite literal: many of the artists and writers associated with the *avant garde* were later forced to morph into realists of various kinds (as the example of Eisenstein, discussed in detail in the Coda, demonstrates). Devin Fore argues that the return of figurative art in Europe in the interwar years did not imply a regression: realism after modernism could not be the same as realism before modernism; it bore the traces of the journey. Implicit in this thesis is the notion that realism after modernism was still realism *during* modernity. Realism was forced to contend with a fundamentally transformed human subject: 'that body is no longer an organic whole and the human is no longer [...] a perfect integer.'¹⁷³

The Man with a Shattered World is a portrait of a person who experiences the world in bits and pieces. He is alienated, split, incomplete. The process of writing is an attempt to re-integrate the subject back into a whole. Yet despite the hopeful assertions that litter the text, a moment of final reconciliation is never reached. Luria

¹⁷¹ Esther Leslie, 'The Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: "The fact of new forms of life, already born and active"' in *A Concise Companion to Realism* ed. by Matthew Beaumont ed. (Chichester; Wiley Blackwell, 2010), pp. 143-159, p. 144.

¹⁷² Leslie, p. 156.

¹⁷³ Devin Fore, *Realism After Modernism: The Rehumanisation of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2012), p. 4.

clearly stated that his patient could 'no longer synthesise.'¹⁷⁴ The scar that runs across Zasetsky's brain had an external counterpart in Soviet society; there was no reconciled whole into which Zasetsky could be integrated. The world itself was shattered. Zasetsky is a mutilated subject produced by the realities of modernity. In Luria's case history, conventional socialist realist forms were not sufficient for conveying the reality of a shattered world. In *The Man with a Shattered World* socialist realist and modernist literary forms, by necessity, converge.

According to Régine Robin, although the hero of the socialist realist novel can undergo tragedy, can end up alone, can experience failure, conflict and alienation, he cannot, she insists, be uncertain of his destiny, and the destiny of history with which he is in harmony:

In the new man, there is necessarily and by definition and in the midst of disasters, mud and horror- a wager on the future, on the construction of a new society, a wager on the well-foundedness of the struggle that reconciles him at some point [...] with the movement of history, with which he turns out to be in harmony [...] there is the idea that the deficiencies will be overcome, and that the transparency of social and individual relations will finally be established.¹⁷⁵

Zasetsky himself does not express doubt about the well-foundedness of the struggle he continues to wage, but his optimistic proclamations are undergirded by a poignant acknowledgment that the catastrophes of war (and implicitly the horrors that preceded it) block the path to the version of the future that appeared glowing on the horizon in Soviet propaganda and socialist realist artworks.

Robin cautions against interpreting the establishment of socialist realism as official doctrine as a straightforwardly oppressive top-down gesture, claiming that it emerged from heated collective debates that included thoughtful acknowledgments of the potential pitfalls of the genre and the dangers of 'inane optimism that no longer mirrors any aspect of the harsh struggles of the present.'¹⁷⁶ Despite all that was foreclosed in Soviet literature, Robin insists that ignoring the continued existence of polemic, risks downplaying how much was still at stake in Soviet literature: 'wrinkles on the surface of discourse [...] disclose the violence of the underlying

¹⁷⁴ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁵ Robin, pp. 242-243.

¹⁷⁶ Robin, p. 18

aesthetic debate.¹⁷⁷ Socialist realist novels might have sought to present the image of the future as a perfectly smooth surface, but wrinkles persisted. Attending to these creases, folds and crinkles suggests that the image of reconciliation presented by the socialist realist novel, in tension with the historical present that produced it, always contained some disavowed acknowledgement of its own impossibility; an impossibility that is heightened in Luria's non-fictional case history.

In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1956), in what became a canonical text in parts of the Eastern bloc, György Lukács defined and defended realism against modernism.¹⁷⁸ Lukács's main criticism of modernist literature is that it does not criticise reality but presents an 'aesthetically appealing but decadent' image of the contemporary world refracted through the prism of subjectivity.¹⁷⁹ In the process, he claims, events are robbed of their historicity and meaning: 'the reflection of a distortion becomes a distorted reflection.'¹⁸⁰ Lukács does not define modernism formally or aesthetically but ethically; he describes it as a particular comportment to world. Here, his attacks on modernism recall Malabou's descriptions of the 'new wounded': apathetic, detached, hopeless, or, in Lukács words, 'without direction, without motivation, without development'.¹⁸¹ For Lukács, modernist works by definition lack a communist horizon. They are static, inert, nihilistic; they imagine the world as a baffling, alien landscape governed by inexplicable malign forces rather than by concrete social relations. Modernist literature, he claims, depicts angst and chaos, whereas socialist literature should aim to transcend it. His analysis primarily focuses on European nineteenth-century 'critical realist' novels, with Thomas Mann emerging as the approved culmination of this tradition. In the book's final chapter, Lukács turns to a consideration of socialist realism, which he advocates as the literary form to pursue.

¹⁷⁷ Robin, p. 19. Comay, drawing on Proust and Benjamin, argues that wrinkles appear only after experiences have been lived. As such: 'the wrinkle is the perfect cipher of traumatic anachrony.' Comay, 'Proust's Remains', p. 24. She proposes a link between ageing flesh and the Proustian writing process: both register experience belatedly.

¹⁷⁸ The text was written in 1956 after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in which Khrushchev delivered his infamous 'secret speech' criticising Stalinism, but before the Hungarian Revolution which was brutally crushed by the Soviet military and prompted a mass exodus from the Communist Party in countries outside the Eastern bloc.

¹⁷⁹ Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by John and Necke Mander (London; Merlin Press, 1963), p. 92.

¹⁸⁰ Lukács, *Meaning*, p. 92.

¹⁸¹ Lukács, *Meaning*, p. 59.

In Lukács's definition, despite its fragmentary form, Luria's work would be classified as a social realist rather than a modernist text as it is driven by 'the will to overcome angst and chaos.'¹⁸² Furthermore, it also conforms with Lukács's claim that a realist approach is taken by those committed to peace, which he sees as continuous with the communist conviction that human effort can change the course of history.¹⁸³ Lukács's characterisation of anti-war sentiment as evidence of a politics committed to the possibility of challenging the existing state of things might be applied to Luria's case history, in which a lament for a socialist society that did not come to pass is combined with a critique of war that prevents it from sinking into nihilism.

In 'Reconciliation under Duress' (1961), Adorno launched a searing critique of *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. He unrestrainedly pours scorn on Lukács, asking whether an author who so flagrantly disregards the literary merits of the works he is considering, in favour of coarse formulaic prose riddled with 'threadbare clichés'¹⁸⁴ and characterised by the 'unrelieved sterility of Soviet claptrap',¹⁸⁵ deserves to voice an opinion about literature at all. Adorno cites Lukács's discussion of Hegelian reconciliation, in which he acknowledges that a novel may end in the hero's inability to realise his (or very rarely her) dreams and hopes. This conclusion, Lukács argues, is itself Hegelian as reconciliation for Hegel is never completely distinct from resignation. Adorno argues that Lukács proceeds to ignore the implications of this insight for his own work, blithely and blindly assuming that 'all is well with society, that the individual has come into his own and feels at home in his world.'¹⁸⁶ In his early work *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), Lukács had ascribed the sensation of 'transcendental homelessness' to the present, juxtaposing it to the presumed wholeness of the ancient world.¹⁸⁷ Here Lukács longed for the time when the soul knew no 'abyss within itself', noting mournfully that the fragmented and alienated modern human subject could not comprehend the unity that preceded

¹⁸² Lukács, *Meaning*, p. 72.

¹⁸³ Lukács, *Meaning*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁴ Adorno, 'Reconciliation', p. 152.

¹⁸⁵ Adorno, 'Reconciliation', p. 151.

¹⁸⁶ Adorno, 'Reconciliation', p. 176.

¹⁸⁷ Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Rostock (London; Merlin Press, 1971), p. 41.

it: 'everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must be incomplete.'¹⁸⁸ Adorno is attacking Lukács for abandoning this position, for falsely discerning in state socialism the unified utopia that his earlier works had identified in the ancient past.

Beneath the spiteful veneer of Adorno's essay, lurks a melancholy for the writer Lukács was before succumbing to the strictures of the officially sanctioned idiom. Adorno describes the constraining aspect of the Soviet 'imbecility imposed from above' on Lukács's later writings as a 'conceptual structure to which he has sacrificed his intellect [which] is so restricted that it suffocates anything that might have breathed more freely'.¹⁸⁹ To wilfully misread this metaphor more generously than seems intended, although the structure stifles and suppresses, it does not kill. Like Luria's case history, Lukács's prose strains and creaks within the linguistic constraints of the sanctioned nomenclature, while never becoming identical with it; tiny gasps of breath can be discerned. There are wrinkles on the surface.

Returning to Luria's case history, it could not be maintained that it suggests all antagonisms will finally be eliminated. Although ostensibly staging a transition from spontaneity to consciousness, from the broken to the unified, from the wounded to the healed the work is not, finally, a portrait of reconciliation. The real fissures in both subject and world cannot be ignored. However, Zasetzky's determination to heal and the case history's optimistic ending ensure that the work is emphatically not a portrait of resignation either. Rather than castigating it for falling prey to naïve optimism in a system that cannot be redeemed (as Adorno does Lukács), perhaps it could instead be read an attempt to discover something in the contradictions, in the wrinkles; to find hope in the failures of the past.

Robin imagines the majestic monuments of the fallen Communist regime coming to life and remembering their past. The monuments had attempted to install a kind of forgetfulness, an uncomplicated image of wholeness. Now as they crumble, the contradictions they attempted to suppress emerge. Robin understands this process

¹⁸⁸ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 30, p. 34.

¹⁸⁹ Adorno, 'Reconciliation', p. 168.

in psychoanalytic terms as a form of repression; the more the contradictions were denied, the more they threatened to erupt into view:

Socialist realism which strove to block out opaqueness and misunderstanding, tragically destroyed the revolutionary social imaginary. I would say that the more fantasies of clarity, flamboyance, purity, homogeneity, transparency, fusion, and non-separation are nurtured, the more they repress obscurity, dissonance, gaps and holes, then the more obscurity, the unmasterable, dissonance, and events return into the rear. By driving out history, events precipitate themselves. By parrying distrust, madness precipitates itself. Fostering the romance only develops the horror.¹⁹⁰

However, perhaps we can begin to recognise the monuments of the socialist regime as ruins even before they crumbled.¹⁹¹ Here we might recall Kracauer's claim that 'the position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions from that epoch's judgments about itself.'¹⁹² The rough and wrinkled surface of Luria's text, saturated with familiar Soviet rhetoric yet riven with gaps and holes, registers the antagonisms of history. Indeed, it was Luria's development of a 'romantic' approach to science that allowed him to apprehend (and therefore question) the horror of history. The text approaches the possibility of a transformed future via the past in the manner Comay describes as 'the fragile moment where the unforeseeable meets the immemorial –the point where sketch meets ruin.'¹⁹³ In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács spoke of writers who tried 'to forge an armour of purple steel out of their own streaming blood so that their wounds may be concealed forever'.¹⁹⁴ Luria's text concedes that as long as the blood is still flowing the wounds cannot be ignored.

In their introduction to the Russian translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1925, Luria and Vygotsky praised the dialectical qualities of Freud's essay, but refused to accept the conservatism of the instincts it outlined. Their attempt to by-pass the death drive, however, drained Freud's work of precisely the

¹⁹⁰ Robin, p. xxxvii.

¹⁹¹ This is a reference to Walter Benjamin's phrase: 'With the destabilising of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.' Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. and trans. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA; Belnap Press, 1999), p. 13. Ruins are also central to Benjamin's discussion of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: 'history does not so much assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay [...] Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.' *Origin*, p. 78.

¹⁹² Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' in *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 75-86, p. 75.

¹⁹³ Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 147.

contradictory tension that Luria and Vygotsky had lauded as dialectical. Luria and Vygotsky thus hazily imagined a harmonious communist future free from the entropic drag of an instinct that seeks to restore a previous state of things. For Freud, death (or inorganic nature) is an original and ultimate state of reconciliation, but as long as life exists so does tension; life and death are locked in a constant tussle of assimilation and negation. Death paradoxically propels life forwards, without it life would be reduced to a tepid and stagnant subsistence. Luria and Vygotsky's attempt to politically radicalise Freud's theory missed this fundamental insight of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In his early work, written in the heady post-revolutionary years, Luria imagined a straight path to a harmonious communist future, but *The Man with a Shattered World*, provides an alternative vision. Luria ultimately acknowledged that final reconciliation was impossible, but in the process found a means of questioning the concrete conditions of the present. Just as Freud's therapeutic pessimism did not compel him to abandon psychoanalytic treatment, so Luria's confrontation with the violence of history does not leave us in a position of resignation. Although the path is blocked, strewn with catastrophic debris, the journey is not abandoned. Luria is instead forced to adopt the limping movement of Freud's essay. *The Man with a Shattered World*, like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is animated by a negative dialectic, in which persistent conflicts impel history forwards.

Leaving Scars Behind

The 'end of history' was infamously proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in 1989. After the fall of the Berlin wall and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, capitalism was apparently unassailable. Fukuyama intended to reclaim the dialectic for the right, inverting the Marxist assumption that history was driving towards communism. This theoretical formulation was borrowed from Alexandre Kojève.¹⁹⁵ Kojève's 'explosive reinvention' of Hegel, laid out in a hugely influential series of

¹⁹⁴ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁵ 'It is Hegel's misfortune to be known now primarily as Marx's precursors [...] In France, however, there has been an effort to save Hegel from his Marxist interpreters [...] the greatest [interpreter] was certainly Alexandre Kojève, [...] [who] sought to resurrect the Hegel who proclaimed history to be at an end in 1806.' Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), 3-18, p. 4.

lectures in Paris, conceived of history as already at an end.¹⁹⁶ According to Kojève, with the cessation of time, the tension between subject and object ceases. Humanity dissolves back into the natural world. This does not spell a ‘cosmic catastrophe’ in which humanity literally dies, but the end of ‘man’ as a negating entity: ‘the natural World remains what it has been from all eternity [...] Man remains alive as animal in harmony with Nature of given Being. What disappears is Man properly so called.’¹⁹⁷ Humanity in history was defined by action, the transformation of the natural world through negation. When a moment of final reconciliation is reached, dynamic modification is replaced by unification; ‘man’ as such ceases to exist. The disappearance of humanity for Kojève is the disappearance of ‘action negating the given, and Error, or, in general the Subject opposed to the Object’.¹⁹⁸ Absolute Knowledge, for Kojève, is thus the end of historical time. In Fukuyama’s hands, this future-less present was signalled by the defeat of state socialism; capitalism becomes indistinguishable from nature, its continued existence assured in perpetuity.¹⁹⁹

Malabou's first book *The Future of Hegel* deviates from Kojève in her insistence on the centrality of the future to Hegel. She attacks the ‘congealed form of a perpetual present’ that Kojève's writing points towards.²⁰⁰ Plasticity, she insists, gives form to the future. The moment of Absolute Knowledge is not the end of all time, but the end of a specific form of time. In its place arises a ‘new era of plasticity in which subjectivity gives itself the form which at the same time it receives.’²⁰¹ However, in her more recent work, the focus has shifted from creative to destructive plasticity; the future disappears from the horizon. Malabou's ‘new wounded’ are figures at the end of history, cut off from past and future. No scar is left behind, not because the wound is healed, but because the damage is too profound. Accidents do not merely graze the surface, but represent absolute discontinuity, a total obliteration of the subject's essence. The Hegelian *aufhebung* simultaneously preserves and

¹⁹⁶ See, Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London; Verso, 2014), p. 89.

¹⁹⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by Allan Bloom, trans. by James H Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY; Basic Books, 1969), p. 158.

¹⁹⁸ Kojève, pp. 158-159.

¹⁹⁹ Kojève also describes America as ‘prefiguring the ‘eternal present of all humanity’ with the USSR and China trailing behind, p. 161.

²⁰⁰ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic* (New York, NY; Routledge, 2005), p. 6.

²⁰¹ Malabou, *Future of Hegel*, p. 133.

destroys, whereas Malabou identifies a form of pure destruction. The subject here - without history, affect or agency - implodes. And Malabou does not confine her analysis to people who have experienced brain injuries. She argues that the transformations in subjectivity experienced by brain injured people can also be witnessed in those who have experienced socially induced trauma: 'the impact of social war today is just as forceful as a brain lesion, and no less violent than being struck by a bullet or an iron bar.'²⁰² These two experiences are not only linked by their severity, but also by their apparent lack of any meaningful aetiology: 'their sense, like that of a brain lesion, remains dissimulated beneath and absence of sense - social conflict without dialectic, as anonymous as a natural catastrophe - an absence that reveals *the very coolness of the political and the social today*.'²⁰³ Malabou's turn to destructive plasticity drains plasticity of the dialectical qualities she assigned it in her earlier work. Politically, this leads to a position of resignation: she diagnoses the contemporary condition without attempting to treat it.

Malabou claims that Luria's case history fails to acknowledge the 'the incursion of the negative' in his patient Zasetzky's condition.²⁰⁴ However, as this chapter has demonstrated, Luria did recognise the violent and destructive impact of the wound Zasetzky survived and acknowledged the permanent damage it inflicted. He also reflected upon its specific social origins. He insisted that the wound existed in dialectical opposition to his patient's will to recover. The 'new figures of the void' described by Malabou, on the other hand, enter a perpetual present cut off from former identities and future hopes: 'history has been annihilated'.²⁰⁵ The negativity Luria describes always exists in opposition to something - Zasetzky is driven by all that he lacks - whereas Malabou describes a state of pure negativity; life and death are no longer dynamically opposed, they meld into a flat singularity. Unlike in Luria's case history, for Malabou's 'new wounded', destruction is not accompanied by creation.

²⁰² Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 160.

²⁰³ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 160.

²⁰⁴ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 188.

²⁰⁵ Malabou, *Wounded*, p. 140.

Hegel insisted otherwise. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel, lampooning Volney, describes the feeling of sadness inspired by the contemplation of ancient ruins, acknowledging that it seems impossible to regard change in such situations in anything but a negative light: ‘What traveller among the ruins of Carthage, of Palmyra, Persepolis, or Rome, has not been stimulated by reflections on the transiency of kingdoms and men, and to sadness at the thought of a vigorous and rich life now departed’.²⁰⁶ However, he continues by observing that the historical events that bring about such dissolution simultaneously give rise to ‘a new life — that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death.’²⁰⁷ Spirit may exist in an ‘eternal now’ but this ‘comprehends within it all earlier steps’. It is only through confronting the ‘empty and fruitless sublimities’ of the ‘slaughter-bench’ of history that a better life might emerge.²⁰⁸

‘The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind’, Hegel famously declares in his rush towards reconciliation at the closing of *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²⁰⁹ This seems to indicate the possibility of reaching a time without ruins in which historic slaughters can be left behind. When the End of History has been reached, dialectical tension apparently disappears. Comay notes with perspicacity that Hegel’s declaration is anathema to the contemporary reader:

In our trauma-besotted, memory-obsessed ‘wound culture’, Hegel’s formula seems magical, shamanistic, apologetic – cosmetic surgery applied to the structurally unhealing or contingently unhealed wounds of historical existence.²¹⁰

As George Bataille famously noted in a letter to Kojève: ‘the open wound that is my life - constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel’s closed system.’²¹¹ Yet characterising Hegel as naïve, lax or apathetic for conceiving of a final moment of reconciliation, says Comay, misses the point of Absolute Knowledge. She reads

²⁰⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree, (New York, NY; Dover Publications, 1956) p. 72.

²⁰⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 73.

²⁰⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 21.

²⁰⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p. 407. The phrase ‘rush toward an economy of reconciliation’ comes from Jacques Derrida, ‘To Forgive the Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible’ in *Questioning God*, ed. John Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 46, cited in Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 128.

²¹⁰ Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 129.

²¹¹ Cited in Giorgio Agamben, ‘Acephalous’ in *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 5-8, p. 6.

Hegel against the grain, insisting that even in the closing pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* reconciliation retains an unfinished aspect, characterised by a restlessly impelling urge to reconcile. This negative dialectic, she argues, resembles the Freudian death drive, which impels the organism to take circuitous conflict-ridden routes towards its final moment of reconciliation (death). In both cases the journey is more important than the destination. Contra Kojève's vision of the end of history and Malabou's discussions of the new wounded, Comay suggests that Absolute Knowledge confirms rather than refutes the wounded life that Bataille described:

The only way to close the wound, or rather to undo its coercive power, is to reopen it; to become what we are. Absolute knowing is just the subject's identification with the woundedness that it is. Antidote is in this respect indistinguishable from injury, health from illness, and poison from cure.²¹²

It is this (non)identification that Luria's case history captures; Zasetzky's sense of self derives from the struggle to heal rather than the achievement of healing. The case history is dialectical, and the dialectic it describes, like the similarly compulsive death drive, constantly weaves and unweaves like Penelope: 'the work is infinite and the shroud forever unfinished.'²¹³ The *Phenomenology* emerges for Comay as 'the perfect case study of interminable analysis' in which woundedness and healing remain intertwined.²¹⁴ This, she says, allows for a confrontation with 'the infinity of the injury [...] the repetitive, restless energy of the dialectic, its obsessive, circular, doing and undoing'.²¹⁵

In her discussion of reconciliation in Hegel, Comay draws on Adorno's discussions of Beckett. Adorno treats Beckett's *Endgame* as the exemplary work of art after the Second World War. Beckett succeeds in capturing the 'bombed-out consciousness'²¹⁶ that emerges from the debris, a smashed subjectivity that can no longer reflect on itself:

After the Second World War everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture, without knowing it; humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events

²¹² Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 130.

²¹³ Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 130.

²¹⁴ Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 131.

²¹⁵ Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 130.

²¹⁶ Adorno, 'Trying to Understand Endgame' trans. by Michael T. Jones, *New German Critique*, 26, (1982), 119-150, p. 123.

which even the survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which renders futile self-reflection of one's battered state.²¹⁷

The Man with a Shattered World describes a wounded subjectivity akin to that described by Adorno. Luria's shattered subject bears a superficial resemblance to Malabou's 'new wounded' – humanity severed by the sudden violence of an unforeseen event. There is, however, a fundamental difference between Malabou's accident (which might be anything or nothing)²¹⁸ and Adorno's specific, historically unprecedented catastrophe. Ultimately Malabou's proposition is bleaker. She insists that the 'future harbours nothing to come,'²¹⁹ whereas Adorno discerns a glimmer of hope in Beckett's work. As he comments in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'Even artworks that incorruptibly refuse celebration and consolation do not wipe out radiance.'²²⁰ For Adorno, the terrain in *Endgame* is not empty, it is *almost* empty. An 'oblique light' shines.²²¹ Beckett specifies that the action plays out under a grey light.²²² When Clov looks through his telescope he sees 'Grey. [...] Grey! [...] GRREY!'²²³ The light is feeble, certainly, but it is not identical with darkness. In this near darkness 'consciousness begins to look its own demise in the eye, as if it wanted to survive the demise.'²²⁴ A faint shard of hope glints dimly in the bleakness. And this tiny fragment - or 'smithereen' in Clov's terms²²⁵ - is what constitutes the plot of *Endgame*: 'The tiny bit that is also everything – that would be the possibility that something could perhaps change.'²²⁶ This is what Malabou fails to discern in Luria's text (and in Beckett's characters who she aligns neatly with the affectless new wounded). Zazetsky may have been unable to fully recover but his fervent pursuit of recovery defines the narrative of the case history. Hope is maintained in the face of catastrophe. 'To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!'²²⁷

²¹⁷ Adorno, 'Trying...', p. 123.

²¹⁸ Malabou claims that the new wounded might emerge: 'as a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all', *Ontology*, p. 1.

²¹⁹ Malabou, *Ontology*, p. 2.

²²⁰ See also: Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London; Continuum, 1997), p. 82.

²²¹ Adorno, 'Trying...', p. 146.

²²² Samuel Beckett, 'Endgame' in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (Chatham; Faber and Faber, 2006) pp. 89-134, p. 92.

²²³ Beckett, 'Endgame', p. 107.

²²⁴ Adorno, 'Trying...', p. 150.

²²⁵ Beckett, 'Endgame', p. 97.

²²⁶ Adorno, 'Trying...', p. 146.

²²⁷ Beckett, 'Endgame', p. 108.

In the concluding passages of Luria's analysis of Zasetzky he remarks:

His wound healed twenty years ago, but the formation of scar tissue has resulted in attacks. The damaged areas of the cerebral cortex could not be restored. Hence, when he tried to think, his mind had to detour around these scorched areas and employ other faculties with which to learn and try to recover some lost skills. He desperately wanted to wake from this terrible dream, to break through the hopelessness of mental stagnation, to find the world clear and comprehensible instead of having to grope for every word he uttered. But it was impossible [...] He continues to try to recover what was irretrievable, to make something comprehensible out of all the bits and pieces that remain of his life.²²⁸

The 'bits and pieces' of the world can never become 'clear and comprehensible', but perhaps it is possible to make a 'detour around these scorched areas', not to a place of final reconciliation but at least engaging in a 'continuing struggle' and 'exhausting effort' in order to regain something of what has been lost, in the hope of creating something truly transformative in the future. Luria's case history seems to acknowledge that history is not driving towards a definite end point but that it might, nonetheless, be possible to carve out a path through the debris or, like Benjamin's ragpicker, to build something new amid the ruins. As Derrida observes of the movement traced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which, like Comay, aligns Freud's text with the dialectical movement of *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'no *Weg* without *Umweg*: the detour does not overtake the road but constitutes it, breaks open the path.'²²⁹ Zasetzky was aware that he would never reach his destination, but the restless work of weaving and unweaving, the properly negative propulsion epitomised by both the dialectic and the drive must continue. There is no end to Luria's case history, just as there is no end to history: 'He has returned to his story and is still working on it. It has no end.'²³⁰

²²⁸ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 158.

²²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (London; University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 267.

²³⁰ Luria, *Shattered*, p. 159.

Coda

Alexander Luria and Sergei Eisenstein: Beginnings and Endings

Method is a digression. Representation as digression - such is the methodological nature of the treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm. Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum.¹

Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

Plunging Back

Instead of reaching a neat resolution, this thesis will conclude by following the looping temporal logic of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with which it began. Fort/Da: it approaches the future by returning again to the past. Rather than re-tracing the same steps, however, it revisits the key moments and concerns of Luria's career discussed in the preceding four chapters through a consideration of his relationship with the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948).

Luria met Eisenstein soon after moving to Moscow in 1923. They remained friends until the film director's death just after the Second World War. Not only did Luria and Eisenstein discuss psychological and aesthetic questions, but they also had many overlapping interests: in psychoanalysis, in primitivism, in childhood and in pathology. Like Luria, Eisenstein lived and worked through the heady post-revolutionary period and, despite experiencing criticism and censorship, survived the Stalinist Terror and the Second World War. Their work existed in fraught relationship to the Soviet state and its erratic yet prescriptive vocabularies and policies.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London; Verso, 2009), p. 28.

Euphemistic references to the constraints of the period pepper the letters that Luria sent Eisenstein throughout their acquaintance, subtly bewailing, for instance, the difficulties he experienced in obtaining permission to travel abroad.² Analyses of Eisenstein's *oeuvre*, like my discussions of Luria's psychological research, necessarily contend with his absorption of (or, some would argue, by) state ideology. Debates continue to rage about the extent to which Eisenstein's aesthetic vision was fundamentally compromised by Stalinist imperatives.³ As with Žižek's discussions of Shostakovich's symphonies discussed in my Introduction, scholars have read Eisenstein's final film *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* (completed in 1946 but banned until 1958) as both a justification and a critique of Stalinism.⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, Eisenstein, like Luria, is interesting because he produced work under duress which necessarily worked in a particular idiom without being reducible to it. Indeed, the differences between Eisenstein and Luria's understandings of Marxism, communism and the unfolding of history indicate the extent to which discrepancies in thought persisted even during the most oppressive periods of Soviet history.

This coda will consider moments of convergence and divergence between Luria and Eisenstein in the hope of interrogating the understandings of dialectics and development that informed Luria's work, and that have shaped this thesis, setting contrasting elements 'into relations of conflict with one another,' in a method inspired by Eisenstein's discussions of montage technique.⁵

Colliding Forms of Perception

In his discussion of Eisenstein's aesthetics, Peter Wollen declares: 'Eisenstein was influenced by two powerful, but in many ways incompatible teachers of psychology: Freud and Pavlov.'⁶ Eisenstein's connection with Luria, which Wollen overlooks,

² Alexander Luria to Sergei Eisenstein, February 17 1930, Moscow, The Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (RGALI), Sergei Eisenstein Papers, 123-1-19321/26.

³ For a particularly crude example that argues Eisenstein's engagement with the Soviet state invalidated his aesthetic approach from the beginning, see, Ron Briley, 'The Artist in Service of the Revolution', *The History Teacher*, 29, 4 (1996), 525-536.

⁴ See, Kristin Thompson, "'Ivan the Terrible" and Stalinist Russia: A Reexamination,' *Cinema Journal*, 17, 1 (1977), 30-43.

⁵ Sergei Eisenstein, 'Methods of Montage' in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. by Jay Leyda (San Diego, CA; Harverst Harcourt Brace Jovanovic Publishers, 1977), 72-83, p. 78.

⁶ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London; Secker and Warburg, 1969), p. 36.

was more concrete. Luria had attended Eisenstein's production of *The Wise Man* at the Proletkult Theatre in 1923 and the pair remained in touch until the director's death twenty five years later.⁷ Wollen emphasises Pavlov's influence on Eisenstein above all other psychologists, but neglects to consider Eisenstein's personal connections with non-Pavlovian Soviet psychologists like Luria and Vygotsky, and with the German Gestalt psychologists to whom Luria introduced him in the late 1920s.⁸ Eisenstein described Luria as his 'unfailing adviser, friend and consultant'⁹ and credited the psychologist with introducing him to 'a large number of secrets of experimental psychology, usually inaccessible to ordinary mortals.'¹⁰ Luria's work was thrown into the seething cauldron of disparate influences Eisenstein drew on. My concern here, however, is not to ascertain the influence Luria exerted on Eisenstein but to juxtapose moments and motifs from their parallel careers, setting up a contrapuntal relationship in order to throw the developmental movements traced by Luria's research into relief.¹¹

Luria granted Eisenstein access to his patients and laboratories. Luria in turn made use of the Institute of Cinematography to produce scientific instructional films.¹² In *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, David Bordwell claims that the director's 'discussion of prelogical thought reflects his continuing affiliation with Vygotsky and Luria, who studied children, preliterate cultures and brain-damaged patients in search of cognitive processes at variance with deductive reasoning.'¹³ Eisenstein also

⁷ See, Oksana Bulgakowa, *Sergej Eisenstein: Eine Biographie* [*Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography*] (Berlin, Potemkin Press, 1997), p. 80, p. 112. Elena Luria claims that they first met in 1925 or 1926, shortly after the release of *Battleship Potemkin*. Elena Luria, *Moi Otets: A.R. Luria* [*My Father: A.R. Luria*] (Moscow; Gnosis, 1994), p. 121.

⁸ Luria acted as a go-between, putting Eisenstein in touch with Kurt Lewin in Berlin. See, Luria to Kurt Lewin, 20 September 1929, 22 November 1929. Akron, OH, Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP), Kurt Lewin Papers, Box M2931, Folder 2.

⁹ S.M. Eisenstein, 'On Folklore', *Selected Works: vol. 4, Beyond the Stars: The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, ed by Richard Taylor, trans. by William Powell (London; BFI Publishing, 1995), pp. 592-615, p. 611.

¹⁰ Eisenstein, *Metod: Grundproblem*, [*Method: Grundproblem*] (Moscow; Muzei Kino Eizenshtein Tsentr, 2002), p. 136.

¹¹ On Eisenstein's use of counterpoint as an aesthetic strategy, see Yon Barna, *Eisenstein* (London; Sacker and Warburg, 1973), p. 244.

¹² In letters to Kurt Lewin Luria mentions a film made in association with the Film Institute on counting and attention in children. See, Luria to Lewin, November 22 1929 and December 12 1929. Akron, OH, Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP), Kurt Lewin Papers, Box M2931, Folder 2.

¹³ David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 176. Masha Salazkina similarly claims that Eisenstein's interest in 'primitive' forms of thought was

engaged with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pondering the implications of the death drive for art - his theoretical writings touched on the four modes of development around which this thesis is structured.¹⁴ As Bordwell observes, Luria was indeed interested in the relation between the ontogenetic and the phylogenetic. His work also dwelt on moments of origin and processes of development. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, unlike Eisenstein, Luria had little interest in celebrating the thought processes of children, preliterate cultures and brain-damaged patients.

Eisenstein declared: 'Let's work... backwards.'¹⁵ Luria, on the other hand, faced forwards. He studied these figures in the hope that they might shed light on and help to precipitate a transition to an ideal form of 'advanced' cognition. I have argued that Luria's understanding of individual development could be understood as a counterpart to a Marxist-Leninist understanding of historical development. As the opening three chapters of this thesis discussed, Luria's psychological work emphasised successive and progressive linear processes. He sought to trace and even encourage the settling of chaos into order. He viewed the past as something that could and should be left behind: civilisation succeeded primitivism, adulthood succeeded childhood. Eisenstein's concerns were similarly oriented towards an emancipated communist future, but his work proceeded through conflict, shock and superimposition, rather than depicting individual and historical progress as a journey through a successive series of stages. Eisenstein suggested that the past might collide with the present to create something new, whereas Luria was concerned with its elimination or overcoming. Eisenstein hoped to overturn established modes of perception, whereas Luria sought to assimilate people into a pre-existing order.

This difference in emphasis is evident in Eisenstein's essay 'Beyond the Shot' (1929). Eisenstein justifies his abandonment of realist proportion and scale in cinema through a discussion of children's drawings shown to him by Luria. In these sketches the children have not obeyed the laws of realism, but depict the object of

influenced by Luria. See, Masha Salazkina, *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico* (Chicago, IL; University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 184.

¹⁴ See, Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London; IB Tauris, 2003), p. 201.

most importance as much larger than other objects in the scene. The proportions of the image correspond to the relative significance of the different objects, rather than their literal size. Eisenstein uses this example to launch an attack on ‘orthodox formal logic’ which attempts to uphold ‘the inviolable order of things’.¹⁶ He announces that: ‘Positivist realism is by no means the correct form of perception. It is simply a function of a particular form of social structure, following on from an autocratic state uniformity of thought.’¹⁷ The principle of montage creates ‘collision’ and ‘conflict’, blasting through the staleness and ‘ideological uniformity’ of received modes of perception.¹⁸ Luria’s psychological work is mobilised by Eisenstein in support of an art form that will unsettle people’s habitual ways of seeing.

Here, however, Eisenstein’s discussion of childhood perception is closer to Walter Benjamin’s contemporaneous writings (that form the basis of my discussion in Chapter 3) than to Luria’s.¹⁹ Eisenstein suggests that children point to ways of unsettling or challenging the existing adult world, whereas Luria sought to instil a mode of representation in accordance with established forms of logic. Luria discusses the same drawing referenced by Eisenstein (of a room in which a box of matches are presented as disproportionately large) in ‘The Child and its Behaviour’ (1930) (Plate 5.1). His main concern in analysing the drawing is with pointing to the child’s failure to perceive the connections between things:

A complex systematic picture of the world, an arrangement of its phenomena according to their connections and causative relations is replaced by a simple ‘gluing’ together, a primitive combining, of isolated features.²⁰

In the same discussion Luria also includes a drawing of a figure on a horse by an illiterate Uzbek peasant, a reproduction of which is preserved in the Eisenstein

¹⁵ Eisenstein, ‘The Psychology of Art’ in *The Psychology of Composition*, ed. and trans. by Alan Unchurch (London; Methuen, 1988), pp. 1-15, p. 8.

¹⁶ Eisenstein, ‘Beyond the Shot’, *vol. 1, Selected Writings, 1922-34* (London; BFI, 1988), ed. by Richard Taylor, pp. 138-150, p. 142.

¹⁷ Eisenstein, ‘Beyond the Shot’, p. 142.

¹⁸ Eisenstein, ‘Beyond the Shot’, p. 144.

¹⁹ Benjamin, who was also committed to a technique of montage, discusses Eisenstein’s work in his essay ‘On the Present Situation of Russian Film’, *Selected Writings, vol. 2*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 12-15.

²⁰ Luria, ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’ in Vygotsky and Luria, *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child* ed. and trans. by Victor I. Golod and Jane E. Knox (Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), pp. 140-231, p. 157. According to the book’s introduction ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’ was written solely by Luria. See, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, pp. 1-35, p. 24.

archives (Plate 5.2). Luria links childhood perception to this ‘primitive’ representation, claiming that both isolate elements ‘without synthesising them into an integral image’.²¹ In highlighting the shortcomings of childhood perception and the perception of an ‘Uzbek woman with little cultural background’,²² Luria’s intentions seem closer to that criticised by Eisenstein: ‘Displacing the expressiveness of archaic disproportion for regulated ‘stone tables’ of officially decreed harmony.’²³

This coda will first compare Eisenstein’s late interest in origins with the conception of progress that informed the majority of Luria’s work. It will then turn to a discussion of Luria’s case history *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, the protagonist of which Eisenstein evinced a particular fascination in. This thesis has argued that Luria’s case history *The Man with a Shattered World*, demonstrated a break from the progressive models which informed his writings on psychoanalysis, Uzbek culture and childhood. This coda similarly begins by contrasting Luria’s progressive developmental model for understanding individual and historical development (which forms the basis of the discussions in the opening three chapters of this thesis) with Eisenstein’s less linear discussions of dialectical development and revolutionary modes of perception. In my concluding discussion I argue that in his two case histories Luria discarded his customary frameworks and provided a vision of the possibilities for human and historical transformation that surpassed Eisenstein’s by attending to the struggles and fissures of past and present, without losing hope for the future.

Beginnings and Endings

When Eisenstein died in 1948 Luria performed an autopsy, slicing open his friend’s skull to search for material signs of creative genius. Luria kept photographs of the film director’s brain until his own death thirty years later, showing his students the unusually enlarged right hemisphere (the section of the brain responsible for visual

²¹ Luria, ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’, p. 158.

²² Luria, ‘The Child and Its Behaviour’, p. 158.

²³ Eisenstein, ‘The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram’ in Eisenstein, *Film Form*, pp. 28-44, p. 35. This essay (also from 1929) contains a discussion of the children’s pictures shown to Eisenstein by Luria similar to that discussed in ‘Beyond the Shot’.

processes).²⁴ One of Luria's former collaborators recalled that Luria preserved the brain itself in a glass vessel filled with alcohol 'because it had an interesting shape.'²⁵

In life, Eisenstein had his own collection of deathly objects. Nestled among the books, antiquities and Mexican handicrafts in his Moscow apartment, he kept a human foetus in a jar of formaldehyde. He was moved to acquire the specimen, which floated eerily on the threshold between pre-human and human, after experiencing a foetus die in his hands during a shoot for an educational film about abortion in Switzerland.²⁶

As his own life neared its end, Eisenstein became increasingly preoccupied with beginnings and endings. On the ontogenetic level, he dwelled on intrauterine experience and death. He also returned to the beginnings of his own life, composing a memoir reflecting on his formative childhood impressions and experiences. In this autobiographical work he noted that his 'life had passed at a gallop, without a backward glance, in constant transit, leaving one train to catch after another', but that he was now inspired to pause and cast his eyes back over the journey.²⁷ These interests had a phylogenetic counterpart: Eisenstein's writings turned to explorations of the primitive, pre-historic and primordial.²⁸

On the 19th September 1947, just five months before his death, Eisenstein wrote in his diary:

Aleksandr R Luria telephoned me yesterday, inviting me to give a series of lectures on the psychology of art at the Psychology Institute of Moscow

²⁴ V. Ivanov, *Chet i nechet: Asimmetriia Mozga i Znakovykh Sistem [Odd and Even: Asymmetry of the Brain and Sign Systems]* (Moscow: Sovetskoe Radio, 1978) cited in Julia Vassileva, 'Eisenstein/Vygotsky /Luria's project: Cinematic Thinking and the Integrative Science of Mind and Brain', *Screening the Past*, 38, (2013).

²⁵ K. E. Levitin, 'Epilogue: Luria's Psychological Symphony', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 6, 36 (1998), pp. 33-62, p. 54.

²⁶ This episode is recounted in Nesbet, p. 140.

²⁷ Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories: An Autobiography* trans. by Herbert Marshall (London; Peter Owen, 1985), p. 3.

²⁸ Nesbet describes a shift in Eisenstein's thought away from shock and montage (as discussed by Wollen): 'Gradually Eisenstein was shifting away from his earlier emphasis on the abrupt, violent changes that shifts the course of history, towards an interest in the early protoplasmic forms of life, in the shapes and forms of things before identity is determined.' p. 142. On Eisenstein's late interest in early forms of life see also: Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant Garde* (London; Verso, 2002), pp. 222-237, Barna, p. 268 and Salazkina, p. 133.

University (for students of the senior class). Not having made up my mind to do it, I naturally started planning this morning while in bed how I would present such a series.²⁹

In the conspectus he submitted to Luria for their planned collaborative lecture course on 'The Psychology of the Creative Process', Eisenstein outlined his intention to discuss art through an analysis of life in its embryonic form, and an exploration of the sensuousness of thought prior to the acquisition of language. This chimes with his discussion of human psychology in his autobiography:

Regarding 'man' again, it is interesting that the presence of the human (very human!) basis interests me in its most 'not yet human' stage. That is, in all those spheres and beginnings where man is present in art in a way that is hidden, not yet manifest.³⁰

His notes suggest that he saw the artwork as a means of accessing and re-experiencing these early stages of existence: 'Plunging "back" to the stage of sensuous thought, we lessen partial control.'³¹

In his 1946 essay 'On Folklore', Eisenstein describes how he increasingly became interested in 'worlds which are dormant within us.'³² He dates this shift in his thinking to a 1935 speech delivered at the All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography, in which he controversially declared that artworks needed to reawaken ancient modes of perception: 'Art is nothing else but an artificial retrogression in the field of psychology towards the forms of earlier thought processes'.³³ He also recalls a significant discussion with Luria, which he credits with sparking his interest in the subject of biological origins.³⁴

Like the movement traced by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which death both precedes and succeeds life, Eisenstein suggested that life was book-ended by moments of reconciliation. In the course proposal he drew up for

²⁹ Eisenstein, 'Conspectus of Lectures on The Psychology of Art' in *The Psychology of Composition*, ed. and trans. by Alan Upchurch (London; Methuen, 1967), pp. 16-25.

³⁰ Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories*, p. 217.

³¹ Eisenstein, 'Conspectus', p. 25.

³² Eisenstein, 'On Folklore', p. 611.

³³ Eisenstein, 'Film Form: New Problems' in *Film Form*, pp. 122-149, p. 144. Alongside a long discussion of primitive cultures, Eisenstein also mentions having been introduced to people being treated for brain injuries in Moscow who exhibit similar patterns of thought, presumably with Luria as his guide (p. 141).

³⁴ Eisenstein, 'On Folklore', p. 611.

Luria in 1947 he noted: ‘In the embryo, there is not yet a conflicting reaction.’³⁵ Like Freud’s equation of death with inorganic nature, Eisenstein imagined a quiescent state from which life emerged and to which it would eventually return.³⁶ Eisenstein’s return to early forms of life, civilization and thought was still conceived of in revolutionary terms, however. He claimed to be drawn to the earliest stages of life and civilization because they, like the imagined communist future, were classless: ‘To where we are plunging them back. To paradise. To the stage of non-differentiating thought. But also the pre-class stage. And therein lies the fascination.’³⁷ Plunging back was therefore also conceived of as a pushing forwards. As Anne Nesbet discusses, for Eisenstein: ‘prehistory is never exactly left behind, but rather turned into a dialectical component of the present historical or aesthetic moment: even the highest most developed image bears at least a plastic trace of its most primitive ancestry.’³⁸ He hoped that exploring the dawn of humanity and the beginnings of life itself might dialectically combine with the contemporary through cinema to create an ecstatic feeling in his audience.³⁹ Eisenstein’s late work does not dispense with the dialectic, but a collision of objects in space (both on screen and in the movie theatre) is replaced with a collision of moments in time.

Eisenstein, like Luria, aligned the thought processes of children with those of primitive peoples; he aligned individual with historical and even with evolutionary

³⁵ Eisenstein, ‘Conspectus’, p. 19.

³⁶ Eisenstein also drew on psychoanalytic discussions of conception and birth. For example, in ‘On Folklore’ he mentions being introduced to Sandor Ferenczi’s work on genitility by Hanns Sachs (p. 600). For a consideration of the similarities between Ferenczi’s discussions of intrauterine existence and Freud’s elaboration of the death drive, see: Daniel E. Greenberg, ‘Instinct and Primary Narcissism in Freud’s Later Theory: An Interpretation and Reformulation of ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 71 (1990), pp. 271-283.

³⁷ Eisenstein, ‘Conspectus’, pp. 16-25.

³⁸ Nesbet, p. 11. Nesbet argues that the vacillating movement that animates Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* also courses through Eisenstein’s late work, observing an oscillation between life and death or womb and tomb in *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (pp. 198-208).

³⁹ Interestingly, Oksana Bulgakowa credits Vygotsky with inspiring a shift in Eisenstein’s thought away from Pavlov in the late 1920s: ‘Vygotsky’s interpretation of the dual structure of aesthetic reaction is precisely what spurred Eisenstein to abandon the reflexological model of montage of attractions in favour of understanding works of art as dynamic unities of opposites that both model and provoke a cathartic response.’ See, Oksana Bulgakowa, ‘From Expressive Movement to the ‘basic problem’: the Vygotsky-Luria-Eisenstein Theory of Art’ in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology*, ed. by Anton Yasnitsky, René van der Veer and Michel Ferrari (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press), pp. 423-448, p. 435. Bulgakowa, like Bordwell, notes that Vygotsky, Luria and Eisenstein had shared interests but she similarly fails to discuss the very different conclusions they reached.

development. He too framed this as a transition from figurative to abstract thought: 'The individual progressively moves from thinking in images and emotions to the maturity of consciousness'.⁴⁰ Unlike Luria, however, whose work described how these early stages would ideally be surpassed, Eisenstein hoped that a great artwork could access dormant yet still extant modes of perception. This involved going beyond the mechanistic physiology of conditioned reflexes that dominated his earlier work (as discussed by Wollen) to access a more distant organic substrate of being:

A responsive reaction is triggered deep within me - beyond the convulsions of the brain, somewhere in the tissue- by the very structures which are my contemporaries from the time when I was an individual on the evolutionary ladder, no more than a child; an embryo, a ball of albuminous protoplasm or a fertile drop, which is all that I once had been.⁴¹

Eisenstein insisted that this regressive movement was progressive.

The process of digging down to reach the most primal forms of thought was addressed to transforming the present. Ancient elements would be brought to the surface where they would combine with the most advanced forms of consciousness to take on 'new, ultra-contemporary forms'.⁴² According to Eisenstein, this dual movement is integral to great works of art. Eisenstein describes how 'a determined progressive ascent towards ideas at the highest peak of consciousness,' must be combined with 'a penetration through the structure of form into the deepest layer of emotional thinking.'⁴³ Like the relationship between the death drive and Eros described by Freud, great artworks, for Eisenstein, are animated by a tension-producing polarity between two opposing tendencies.

The developmental model that underpinned Luria's psychological theories - from his early rejection of the death drive, through his work with illiterate people and children - does implicitly posit a moment of final unity and reconciliation akin to the classless harmony described by Eisenstein. He does not, however, suggest that this recapitulates a lost earlier form on a new level. Unity is only located in the future; Luria does not look back. As such, his work is devoid of the stark opposition

⁴⁰ Eisenstein, 'On Folklore' p. 602.

⁴¹ Eisenstein, 'On Folklore', p. 603.

⁴² Eisenstein, 'On Folklore', p. 605.

of forces integral to Eisenstein's theories, which come closer to the works of Freud and Benjamin that I have counterposed to Luria's more straight-forwardly Marxist-Leninist accounts of historical and individual progression in this thesis.

Despite noting his increased interest in early forms of life, Eisenstein did, however, identify a unifying theme that ran throughout his written and cinematic *oeuvre*:

If I were an impartial researcher, I would say of myself: this author appears to be constantly fixated on one idea, one theme, one subject. Everything he has thought up and done, not only within the different films but through all his plans and films, is in each and every case one and the same thing. Almost invariably, the author uses different periods [...] different countries and peoples [...] different social movements and processes within the shift towards different social forms, as different masks covering one and the same face. This face is the realisation of the ultimate goal - the attainment of unity.⁴⁴

Luria may not have been interested in recapturing original unities but his future-oriented work was similarly concerned with an ultimate goal: the 'advanced' human subject (and his or her implicit historical counterpart: communism or civilization).

This thesis has, however, noted a shift in Luria's theoretical approach evident in his late case history *The Man with the Shattered World* that runs counter to the shift in Eisenstein's career trajectory sketched out above: Luria, contra Eisenstein, moved away from an emphasis on synthesis to an acknowledgment of fragmentation. This shift was prompted, I have argued, by the violent events of history. Eisenstein's experiments in cinematic form were intended to find an aesthetic equivalent to revolution, whereas Luria responded to the shattering impact of war. Confronted with a patient who could not heal but who nonetheless retained a determination to improve his condition, negativity made an incursion into Luria's work. Luria's neat developmental framework was no longer tenable and he was forced to abandon unity as a goal; non-identity displaced identity.

⁴³ Eisenstein, 'Speeches to the All-Union Creative Conference of Soviet Filmworkers', *Selected Works: vol. 3: Writings, 1934-47*, ed. by Richard Taylor, trans by William Powell (London; BFI Publishing, 1996), pp. 16-46, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Eisenstein, 'The Author and his Theme,' *Selected Works, vol. 4*, pp. 787-796, p. 792.

Luria's case histories, written at the end of his long career, point to a more nuanced, sombre and conflicted political vision than Eisenstein's more eschatological equation of a classless society with intrauterine experience or primal protoplasm. The unexpected junctures, collisions and shocks that characterised Eisenstein's films of the 1920s find an unexpected counterpart in Luria's case histories, which describe pathological conditions that preclude their subjects from assimilating into existing structures. This thesis will conclude with a consideration of Luria's case history *The Mind of a Mnemonist*. Published just before *The Man with a Shattered World*, Luria's first case history describes a person with an innate psychological condition, rather than someone whose condition was the result of a specific historical event. Although the subject *The Mind of a Mnemonist* describes was not born of war like Zasetzky, Luria nonetheless claimed that the war had a shattering impact on his scientific methodologies, suggesting that this text also emerged from Luria's historical experiences.⁴⁵

Suffering from Reminiscences

Intrigued by Luria's accounts of a synaesthetic patient with an extraordinary memory, Eisenstein asked that the psychologist introduce them.⁴⁶ In his late essay 'On Colour' (1937-1940), Eisenstein discusses how his reflections on the use of colour in cinema were inspired by his encounters with Luria's synaesthetic patient, Shereshevsky (or 'S'), about whom Luria eventually wrote the best-selling case history *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (1968).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ According to Marie Seton, Eisenstein first learned of Shereshevsky when Luria attended a party at the director's house in 1934, while Eisenstein was hosting the African-American actor Paul Robeson in Moscow. Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography* (London, Dennis Dobson, 1978), p. 328. Eisenstein himself claims to have come across Shereshevsky earlier, saying that he spoke with Luria's patient in 1928 and 1933, S.M. Eisenstein, 'On Colour' in *Selected Works, vol. 2, Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London; BFI, 1991), p. 260.

⁴⁷ In January 1968 Luria wrote to Jerome Bruner to inform him that *Mind of a Mnemonist* would be published simultaneously in Russian and English, noting with incredulity that 105,000 copies had already been ordered in Russia. Bruner replied, joking that Luria was becoming as popular as 'Bulgakov or even Gorky!' See, January 11 1968, Luria to Bruner and February 23 1968 Bruner to Luria. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Archives (HUA), Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975-1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88.

Eisenstein declares that colour is the solution to finding synchronicity between sound and image, but insists that the meanings of colours are deeply subjective and changeable: 'all these quests are individual and arbitrary.'⁴⁸ He celebrates the non-absolute relation, advocating the role of art in creating new modes of perception:

a fixed and once-and-for-all scheme of mutually linked associations, would be profoundly inimical to the very nature of art. For one of the aims of art is to blaze new trails in our awareness of reality, to create new trains of association on the basis of utilising those which already exist.⁴⁹

Despite insisting that existing correlations and associations are contingent, he does, however, imagine that they might eventually assume a fixed form (perhaps making a dutiful nod to the prevailing aesthetic discourses):

in the progression of ever more perfect fusions of colour and sound, in the ever more perfect images that reflect the reality of our time, we shall also draw nearer to an ever fuller representation of the absolute truth of our unique, socialist way of life.⁵⁰

New modes of perception will be blasted into consciousness but will ultimately settle to establish a harmonious truth. He implies that a fixed scheme of meaning will emerge under communism and that cinema can participate in bringing that future unity into being.

Eisenstein may not have believed that synaesthetes could perceive essential connections between things. He did, however, claim that synaesthesia was a mode of perception that was closer to primitive forms of thought. Eisenstein described synaesthesia as 'sensuous primitive thinking', as an 'original bliss' that most humans have evolved away from.⁵¹ He thus saw the synaesthete as being closer than most modern humans to the unity that he imagined characterised the earliest forms of perception. In Eisenstein's descriptions, Luria's patient replicates the ideal temporality he hoped to achieve through art; early forms of perception co-existed with advanced cognition:

⁴⁸ SM Eisenstein, 'On Colour', p. 258. For a detailed discussion of Eisenstein's engagement with synaesthesia see: Robert Robertson, *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema* (London; IB Tauris, 2009), pp. 140-201.

⁴⁹ Eisenstein, 'On Colour', p. 260.

⁵⁰ Eisenstein, 'On Colour', p. 261.

⁵¹ Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. by Herbert Marshall (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 387.

Comrade S's unique gifts were due to the fact that, while being a person of absolutely normal development, he had also retained into mature age all the characteristics of primal mental activity which other people lose as they develop intellectually and evolve towards normal, logical patterns of thought.⁵²

Eisenstein was primarily interested in the sensuous associations that characterise synaesthesia. In the essay 'Vertical Montage' (1940), he describes Shereshevsky's ability 'to see sounds as colours and hear colours as sounds,' and to perceive vowels as 'gradations of light'.⁵³

Luria's case history had a different emphasis: it dwells on the emotional toll of his patient's vast memory. Far from an almost magical capacity to perceive connections between things or an ability to apprehend some lost unity, Luria's narrative presents his patient's condition as distressing and alienating. As in his work with illiterate peasants and children, Luria insisted that the retention of more 'primitive' forms of thought could only be detrimental to future development. The past experienced by Shereshevsky was not harmony but an overwhelming and disorientating chaos, which separated him from his immediate surroundings.

The condition described in *The Mind of a Mnemomist* contrasts starkly with Luria's other case history *The Man With the Shattered World*. The latter's protagonist Zasetzky was cut off from his history and sought desperately to reconnect to it, whereas the mnemomist Shereshevsky suffered from too much connection to the past. His attachment to every experienced moment caused him to disconnect from the present. Even when he purposefully tried to rid himself of information - by scribbling his memories on scraps of paper and throwing them into the fire - he was ultimately incapable of forgetting anything.

Shereshevsky retained words based on the sensual impression they made. As a child reading the Torah with no knowledge of Hebrew, he was able to retain long passages of text as the sounds registered as a series of splashes or puffs of steam that he could exactly reproduce in his mind. He created extraordinarily elaborate interior worlds in order to reconstruct things and all of these psychic fabrications were as

⁵² Eisenstein, 'Vertical Montage', *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 327-399, p. 368.

imperishable as his memories of the external world. When presented with a mathematical equation he would narrativise it, letters became people and symbols became actions: numbers might become jackdaws on a tree or cigarettes in a square. He would be able to reproduce a meaningless equation many years later by using this apparently circuitous visual method. Often he would memorise passages of text or long series of numbers by reconstructing a journey around Moscow, inserting objects along the route that corresponded to specific words. He describes placing a giant transparent head at Sretenski Gates and a statue of a Russian merchant woman on the pavement outside a cinema. He would then be able to repeat this ‘journey’ and reproduce all that he saw along the way, occasionally stumbling if he had accidentally placed an object in an inconspicuous place: ‘Sometimes I put a word in a dark place and have trouble seeing it as I go by.’⁵⁴ It was this associative capacity that inspired Eisenstein. He hoped to follow the example of Japanese Kabuki theatre, which he claimed succeeded in producing a synaesthetic effect on stage: ‘we actually “hear movement” and “see sound”.’⁵⁵

Although Shereshevsky was able to recall the same passages of text or series of numbers many years later, his method for recalling was completely remote from received forms of logic. Luria describes it as ‘a distinct type of dissociation.’⁵⁶ He discusses how Shereshevsky would employ the same laborious method of visualisation even when given a series of sequential numbers like 1,2,3,4: ‘He had no need for logical organisation, for the associations *his* images produced reconstituted themselves whenever he revived the original situation in which something had been registered in his memory.’⁵⁷ Similarly, Luria’s patient found it difficult to follow stories as the narrative would be obscured by the rush of images associated with individual words or syllables. He was often unable to follow the meaning of a conversation as he would be distracted by the taste or smell produced by a person’s voice. He noted that Vygotsky had a voice like crumbly yellow cheese, whereas Eisenstein seemed to speak with many voices at once, like a bouquet: ‘listening to

⁵³ Eisenstein, ‘Vertical Montage,’ p. 368.

⁵⁴ Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*, trans. by Lynn Solotaroff (London; Penguin Books, 1975), p. 33.

⁵⁵ Eisenstein, ‘An Unexpected Juncture’, *Selected Writings, vol. 1*, pp. 115-122, p. 118.

⁵⁶ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 49.

⁵⁷ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 52.

him it was as though a flame with fibres protruding from it was advancing right toward me. I got so interested in his voice, I couldn't follow what he was saying.'⁵⁸

Words for Shereshevsky sparkled or chafed. They could be bright or sharp, rough or bitter, prickly or sticky. The word 'soul' evoked an image of animal livers and lungs on a table. At times his perceptions of words would conflict with their meanings, interfering with his daily activities. He describes his horror at discovering an ice cream seller with a voice which evoked black coal. This overpowering sensual association prompted him to recoil with revulsion, rendering him incapable of purchasing any dessert. If he read while eating the taste associations aroused by the food would blot out the meaning of the text. Although he learnt to direct or enhance his capacities through performing feats on stage, he was not able to fully control his capacity to recall; involuntary associations blotted out the voluntary. In conversation he would 'digress endlessly' distracted by his elaborate chains of association.⁵⁹ The words he encountered provoked such vivid visual associations that meaning was scattered, disrupting his ability to follow instructions or conversations: 'at each step he had to contend with superfluous images and sensations'.⁶⁰

Eisenstein claimed that Shereshevsky's 'characteristics and abilities were retained alongside all the completely normal features of a fully developed mind and intellect,'⁶¹ whereas Luria stressed that his patient's synaesthesia precluded him from experiencing a 'normal' life. Even though Shereshevsky could work and perform the kinds of routine tasks Zasetzky found impossible, he could not establish meaningful human relationships. He found it difficult to remember faces because he experienced them as 'changing patterns of light and shade'.⁶² Shereshevsky's rich interior life overshadowed his connection to his immediate surroundings: '[at] times smoke or fog appears [...] and the more people talk, the harder it gets, until I reach the point where I can't make anything out.'⁶³ Indeed, his imaginative capacity was so vivid that he could mentally place himself in different situations in order to modify his body temperature or lower his threshold to pain. Luria characterised Shereshevsky's

⁵⁸ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 116.

⁶⁰ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 104.

⁶¹ Eisenstein, 'Vertical Montage,' p. 368.

⁶² Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 53.

life as 'a struggle against images that kept rising to the surface of his mind.'⁶⁴ He dealt with the world, including his relationships with his closest family members, 'as though through a haze'.⁶⁵ Although he was more capable of functioning in society than Zasetky, Luria presents Shereshevsky's case as the more tragic due to his patient's detachment and apathy. Though both men were focused on reaching a better future, only Zasetky retained an acute awareness of the struggle required to improve his condition. His relation to the future was rooted in an acknowledgment of the real conditions of the present he inhabited.

In contrast, Luria claimed that Shereshevsky experienced his fantasy life as more 'real' than his everyday experiences: 'The boy was a dreamer whose fantasies were embodied in images that were all too vivid, constituting in themselves another world, one through which he transformed the experiences of everyday life.'⁶⁶ He often felt deep disappointment when reality failed to coincide with his imagined scenes. His everyday experiences thus faded into insignificance:

He lived in wait of something that he assumed was to come his way, and gave himself up to dreaming and 'seeing' far more than to functioning in life. The sense he had that something particularly fine was about to happen remained with him throughout his life – something which would solve all his problems and make his life simple and clear. He 'saw' this and waited [...] Thus everything he did in life was merely 'temporary', what he had to do until the expected would finally come to pass. "I read a great deal and always identified myself with one of the heroes."⁶⁷

This description of Shereshevsky's condition might also be applied to the progressive vision that undergirded the majority of Luria's research, in which the present was treated as being less significant than the future it anticipated: the 'primitive' was encouraged to become 'civilised', the child to become an adult. The people Luria examined may have all inhabited the same historical moment, but Luria placed some of them further back on a developmental ladder. Like Shereshevsky, who described himself as living always 'in the meantime', Luria's research relied on a temporality of deferral. He analysed children or Uzbek people as exemplars of incipient forms of a linear trajectory of development with a pre-determined end

⁶³ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 113.

point. As such, he was not always attentive to the psychologies of those people as they existed in the present moment.

As this thesis has demonstrated, in his work with illiterate peasants and children in the 1930s, Luria sought to replace the existing psychologies of those he was studying with more 'advanced' forms. He wanted immediacy to be replaced by shared mediating structures. He framed this as a process of stabilisation, defined by the cumulative mastery of pre-existing social forms. The psychic reality of the present was thus subordinated to a fantasy of coherence located in an imagined future; an idealised mode of subjectivity was given precedence over the particular subjectivities he encountered in the present. This progressive model of development had a counterpart in the imagined historical trajectory towards communism that permeated Soviet discourse, which similarly imagined spontaneity as a precursor to consciousness and relied on the temporality of 'in the meantime'. The Russian title of *The Man with a Shattered World - A World Lost and Regained* - gestures towards John Milton,⁶⁸ yet most of Luria's work, in synch with the Soviet experience, implied a paradise infinitely deferred. The socialist realist novel assures its readers that harmony will be reached but its promised utopia was situated on an ever-receding horizon.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud defined the reality principle as the 'temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure'.⁶⁹ He goes on to discuss how the death drive similarly prompts people to take long and indirect roads through life to death. For Freud, it is these detours that constitute life. To repeat Derrida's characterisation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: 'no *Weg* without *Umweg*: the detour does not overtake the road but constitutes it, breaks open the path.'⁷⁰ Luria observed that when he went through transcriptions of conversations with Shereshevsky: 'I realised how difficult it was to single out what

⁶⁷ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 117

⁶⁸ The Russian title of Luria's case history is *Poteryanniy i vozvrashchennyi mir* [A Lost and Regained World]. This recalls the Russian translations of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* [*Poteryanniy pai*] and *Paradise Regained* [*Vozrashchennyi pai*].

⁶⁹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition, vol. 18* (London; Vintage, 2001), p. 10.

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (London; University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 267.

was essential from my conversations with S from his endless digressions.⁷¹ Shereshevsky similarly perceived his own life as an endless digression. Yet digressions *were* the essence of his case, just as they constituted the history of the Soviet Union. In both cases the ideal ending was never reached but that does not make the experiences that took place along the way any less significant or real.

Unlike Shereshevsky himself, Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, by attending to the particularities of its protagonist's experiences does root the case in its history. It attends to haze that stood between patient and world as a real experience rooted in the present. Like in *The Man with a Shattered World*, Luria does not occlude the struggles, detours and frustrations that characterised his patient's condition. These 'romantic' case histories are informed by a methodological approach to their subjects that succeeds in anchoring them in their environments in a manner the publications that form the basis of my discussions in Chapters 1-3 failed to achieve.

In a letter to Wilhelm Reich in 1934, Eisenstein attacked psychoanalysis in terms reminiscent of Adorno's remarks in *Minima Moralia* discussed in my introduction. He noted with frustration that psychoanalysts were overly concerned with delineating norms which, he argued, served to uphold the existing state of things. Instead, he insisted that 'the boundary between the normal and the pathological cannot be drawn.'⁷² As this thesis has discussed, the bulk of Luria's work was structured around ideal norms of both individual and social development. His case histories, however, were portraits of pathologies that focused on their protagonists rather than defining them in opposition to a 'normal' figure from whom they departed. Without denying the suffering his patients experienced (often as a result of their disaffiliation from 'normal' society), Luria's case histories nonetheless attempted to describe the psychic experiences of his patients on their own terms, without making them appear as deviations from a 'correct' path of development. The romantic methodology Luria elaborated thus suggests an approach to human psychology that could open up the possibility for critiquing rather than affirming norms. Shifting the emphasis of psychology from an ideal vision of what is 'normal'

⁷¹ Luria, *Mnemonist*, p. 116.

⁷² 'Sergei Eisenstein / Wilhelm Reich, Correspondence', ed. by Francois Albera, trans. by Ben Brewster, *Screen*, 22, 4 (1981), 79-86, p. 85.

to a consideration of particular human subjects with all their inconsistencies and contradictions might then make it possible to question and perhaps even change the 'pathological social world[s]' people continue to inhabit.⁷³ Rather than approaching its subjects from the standpoint of an ideal yet to be realised, a revolutionary psychology must begin in the present.

⁷³ 'Eisenstein / Reich', p. 85.

Plates



Plate 1.1

Gorky House Museum, Moscow (formerly home to the Russian Psychoanalytic Society). The sweeping central staircase was constructed from concrete and designed to imitate nature.

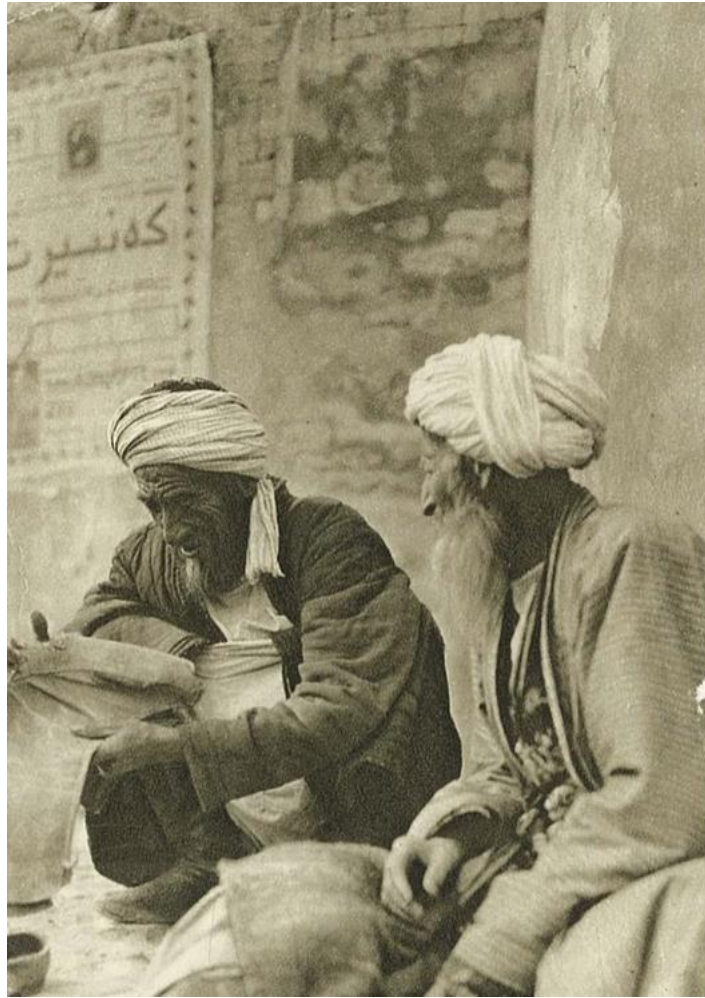


Plate 2.1

Postcard sent from Alexander Luria to Horace Kallen from Samarkand, Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, May 15 1931

Despite the modernizing campaigns underway Soviet postcards tended to portray Central Asia and the Caucasus as traditional places.



Plate 2.2

Postcard sent from Alexander Luria to Horace Kallen from Andijan, Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, August 12 1932



Plate 2.3

Postcard sent from Alexander Luria to Kurt Lewin from Tbilisi, Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, January 25 1936



Plate 2.4

Postcard sent from Alexander Luria to Sergei Eisenstein from Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, August 28 1930

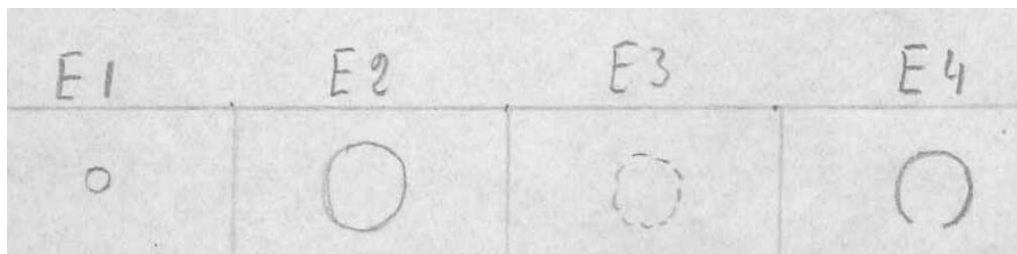


Plate 2.5

Examples of tests used by Kurt Koffka in Central Asia. Subjects were asked to name the shapes shown in the columns.

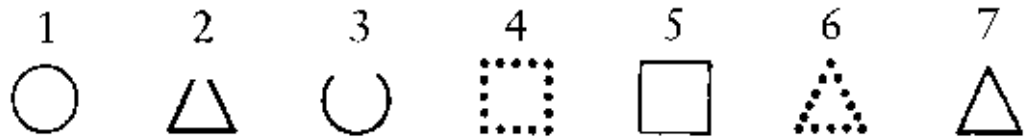


Plate 2.6

Example of test used by Alexander Luria in Central Asia.

As with Koffka's tests, subjects were asked to name the numbered shapes. Those deemed more advanced would describe, for example, 1 as a circle and 2 as a triangle, whereas those deemed backward would describe 1 as a bracelet and 2 as a kettle stand.



Plate 2.7

Uzbek woman in traditional *paranja* with children, 1929

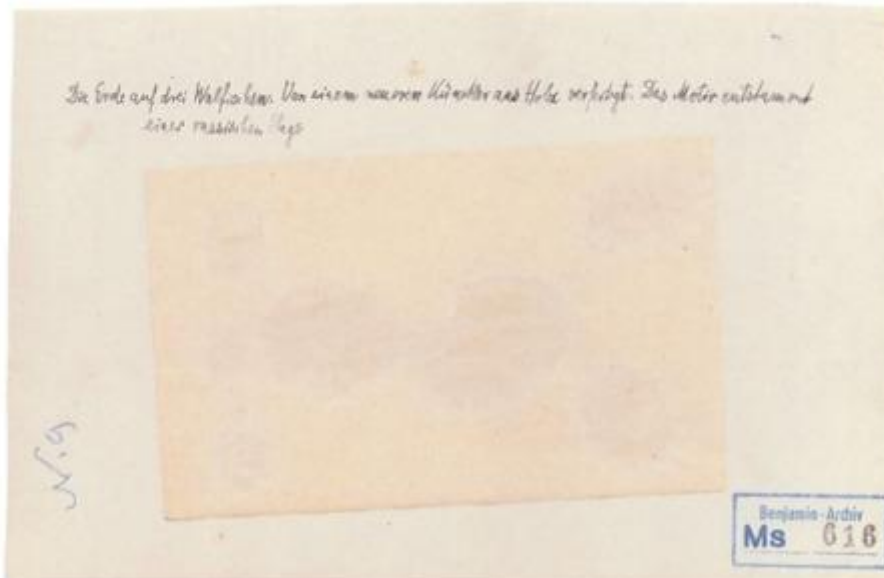
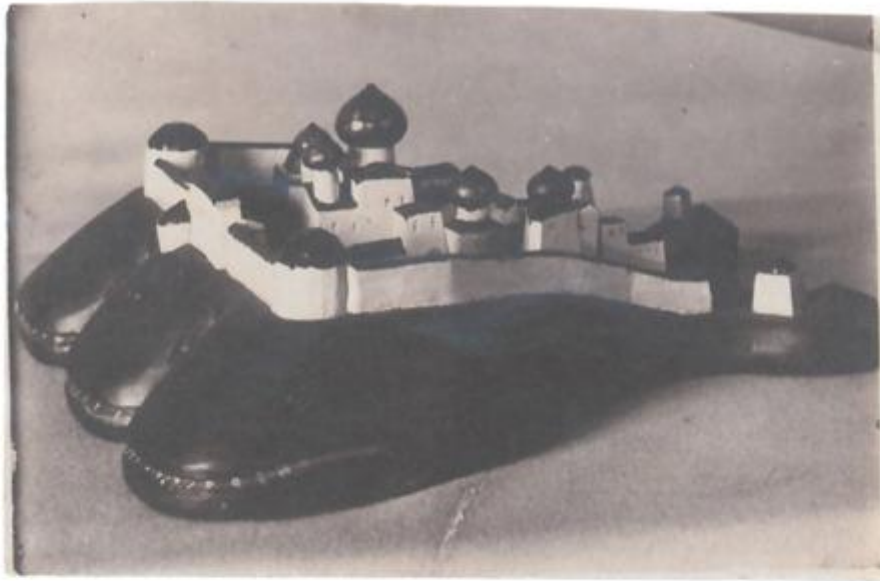


Plate 3.1

Wooden toy, whose photograph Benjamin took on a visit to the Moscow Toy Museum

‘The earth on three whales. Made out of wood by artist. The motif stems from a Russian tale.’



Interessant ist der Vergleich dieser beiden Viatka-Puppen.
Das Pferd, das auf dem einen Modell noch sichtbar ist,
ist auf dem nebenstehenden schon mit dem Mann verbunden.
Dem volkstümlichen Spielzeug strebt nach vereinfachten Formen.

12. 11. 09

Benjamin-Archiv
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Plate 3.2

Two dolls Benjamin admired in the Moscow Toy Museum

‘It is interesting to compare the two Viatka dolls. The horse, which is still visible on the model, has merged with the man on the one next to it. Demotic toys strive for simplified forms.’

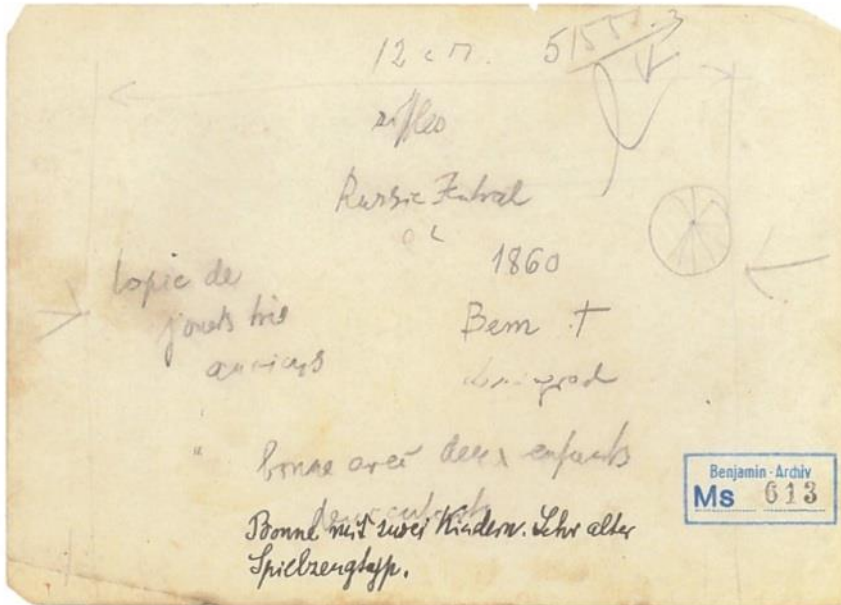


Plate 3.3

Peasant-made toys observed by Benjamin in the Moscow Toy Museum.

‘Nanny with two children. Very old type of toy.’



Plate 3.4

Children assembling toys on a miniature assembly line at an exhibition of new Soviet Toys, Moscow, 1931.



Plate 3.4

Toy Red Army soldier and sailor, given as examples of new 'proletarian toys' that would, it was hoped, replace peasant playthings, 1933.

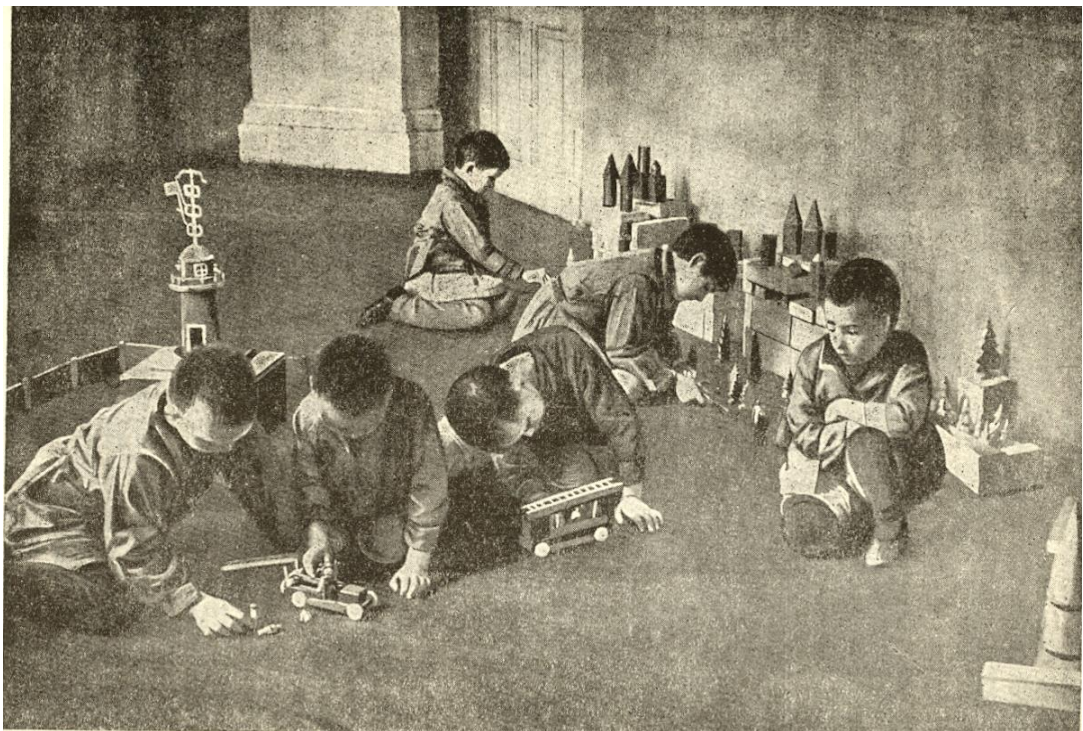


Plate 3.5

Soviet children playing with newly designed toys which were intended to be 'constructive' and plot driven, 1935.

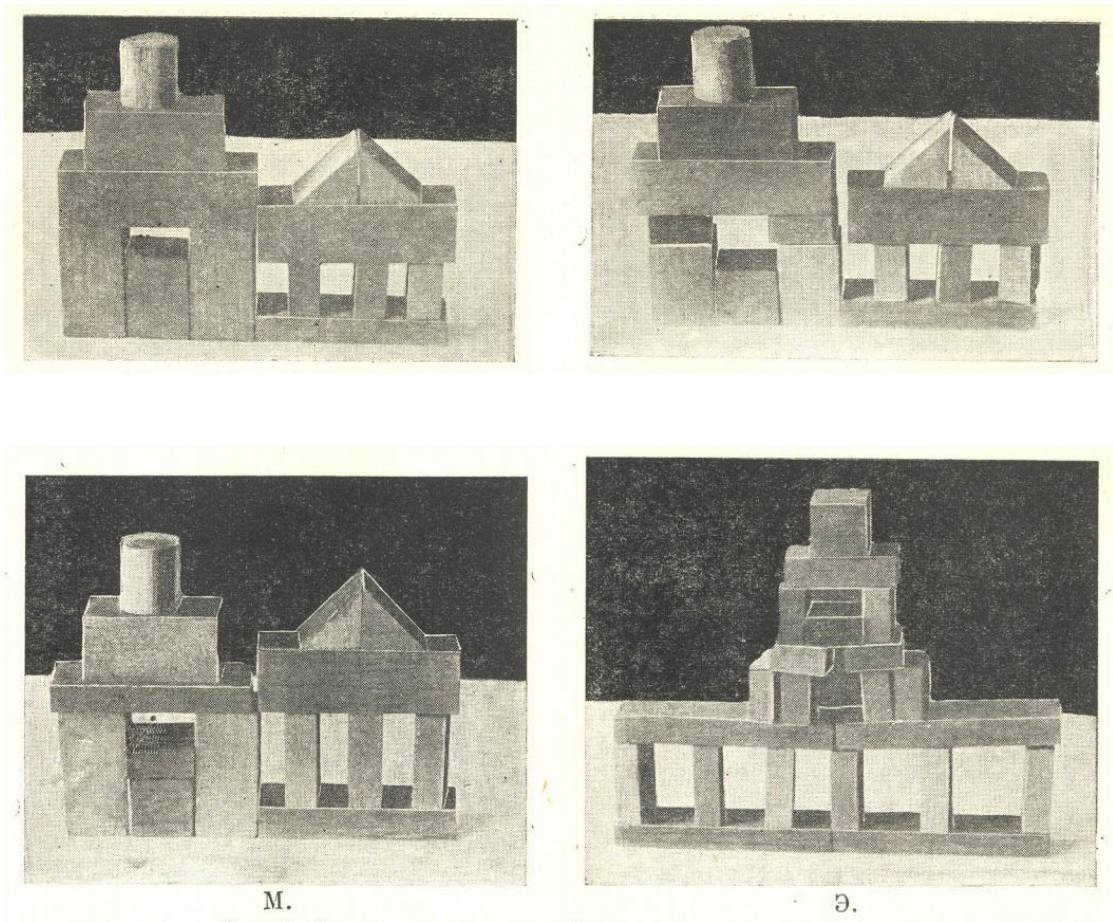


Plate 3.6

In this experiment conducted by Luria and A.N. Miranova in 1936 five pairs of identical twins were separated. Group M were taught to reproduce structures from an outline alone, whereas Group E were allowed to see the position of all the blocks. Here both groups were shown the same model and asked to reproduce it from memory.

The top image shows the models both groups were shown. The image below shows the results. Group M (bottom left) reproduced the model, whereas group E (bottom right) built something very different.



Plate 3.7

Example of a children's book – *Toys* (1928) by A Oluf'eva - illustrated by prominent Constructivist artist, Liubov Popova



Plate 3.8

S. Marshak, *Morozhenone [Icecream]* , with illustrations by V. Lebedev (Moscow; Molodaia Gvardiia, 1929), p. 8



Plate. 3.9

Nikolai Chukovsky, *Malen'kie Deti* [*Little Children*] (Leningrad; Krashaia Gazeta, 1928)



Plate 3.10

Example of an illustrated children's book by Chukovsky published during the NEP-period.

Nikolai Chukovsky, *Hasha Kukhnia* [*Our Kitchen*], with illustrations by N. Lapshina (Leningrad; Gosudarstvennoe izdael'stvo, 1928)



Plate 3.11

Photograph of Soviet children's home for *bezprizornye*, 1930

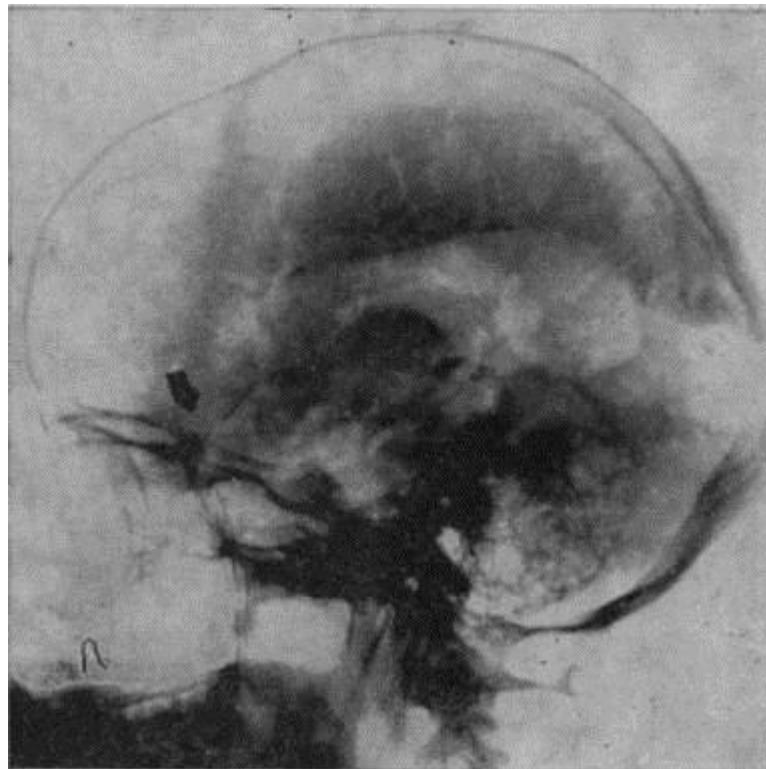


Plate 4.1

X-rays showing Zasetky's skull and the shrapnel lodged in his brain

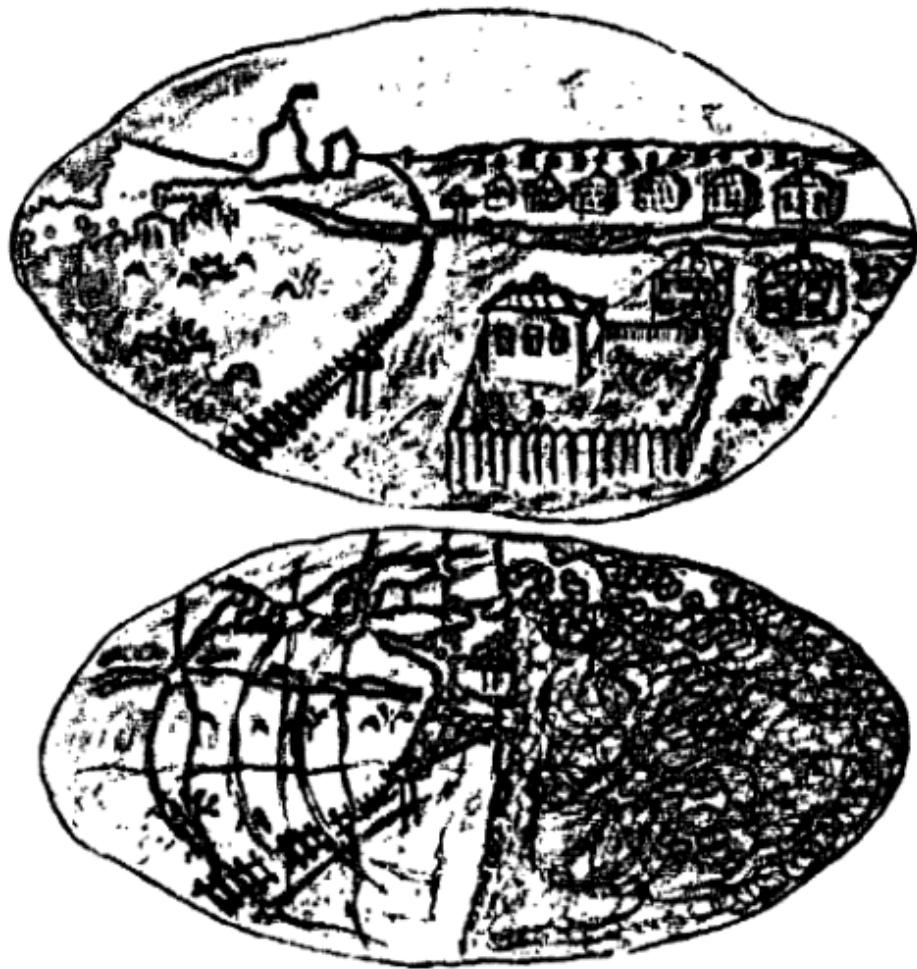


Plate 4.3

Zasetsky's drawing of his vision. The top image shows his memory of vision before his accident and bottom image depicts his vision following injury.



Plate 5.1

In this children's drawing, discussed by both Luria and Eisenstein, a room is depicted in which a box of matches (labelled '5') is represented as disproportionately large in relation to the other objects in the room.

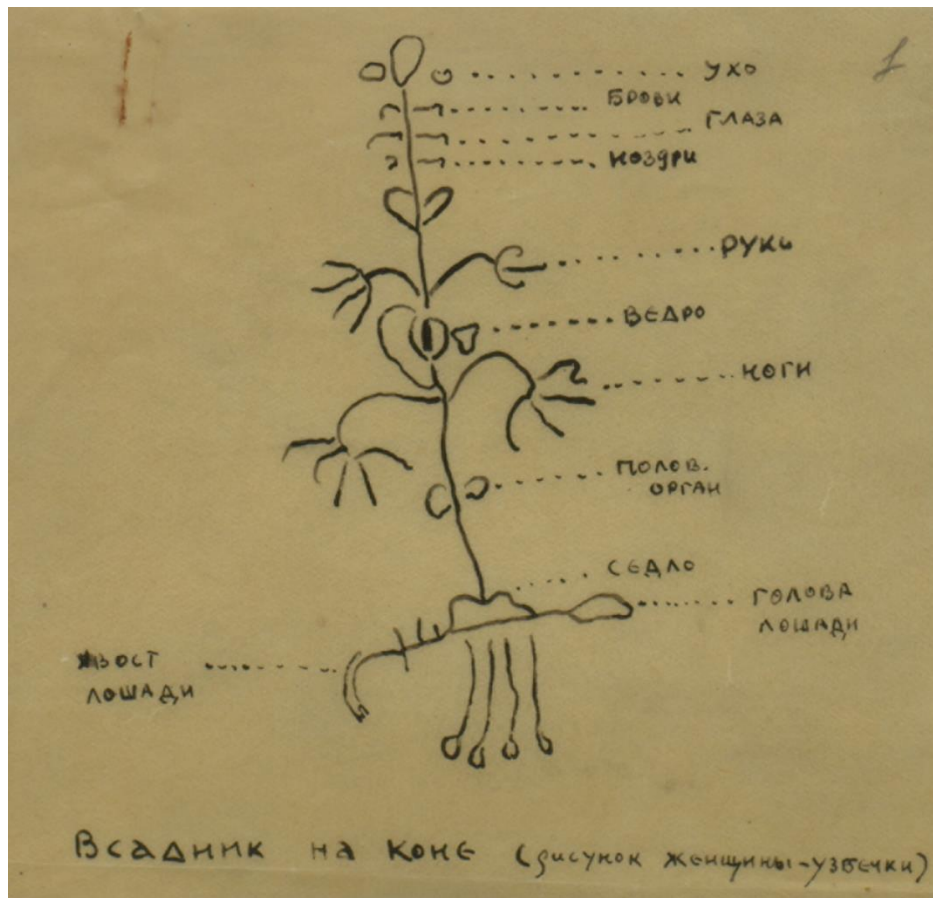


Plate. 5.1

‘Rider on a Horse’

Drawing of a figure on a horse by an Uzbek woman. This drawing from the Eisenstein archives was reproduced and labelled with body parts by Luria. The image also appears in Luria’s essay ‘The Child and its Behaviour’. For Luria, ‘primitive’ thinking is characterised by breaking up entities into their composite parts.

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