

Chapter 2

On the Concept of *Perezhivanie*: A Quest for a Critical Review

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Abstract Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* was only partly developed within his lifetime, and this fact, together with the apparent significance of the concept, has provided the impetus for attempts at further understanding and substantiating the concept. This introductory chapter provides an overview of interpretations of *perezhivanie*. I begin first with a brief history of its origins in Stanislavsky, dialectics and reflection theory. Next, I discuss three aspects of Vygotsky's work (and work built on its foundations) that have been related to *perezhivanie* in attempts to illuminate its meaning: his early interest in emotion in *The Psychology of Art*, the concepts of social situation of development and word-meaning and its interpretation within Activity Theory. The interpretive landscape that is revealed provides a point of departure for theorists seeking to understand and use the concept.

2.1 Introduction

The history of the study of the human mind and consciousness is marked with a desire to delineate the boundary between cognition and emotion. The better known *instrumental period* of Vygotsky's work appears to give a precedence to cognition that has been amplified in subsequent interpretations, perhaps beyond Vygotsky's intentions. It is important, then, to look to the last period of Vygotsky's work, in which he (re)turns to issues of emotion raised earlier in his career. Of particular interest is the concept of *perezhivanie*, which ostensibly unifies emotion and cognition, and the individual with their environment, in a single unit to better conceptualise the process of human mental development.

The concept was central to a lecture delivered by Vygotsky at the Herzen State Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad sometime between 1933 and his death in 1934. The stenographic record of this lecture was published in 1935 under the editorship

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of one of his students, M.A. Levina, in *Foundations of Paedology*, a collection of Vygotsky's lectures that would serve as a foundational textbook for future students (Korotaeva 2001). The extent to which this book was edited, revised, or censored, as was common for works published in the Soviet Union is a matter for textological analysis, but regardless, the lecture on perezhivanie was translated to English and appeared in *The Vygotsky Reader* 60 years later in 1994. Given both the difficulty of adequately translating perezhivanie, and its centrality in the lecture now titled "The Problem of the Environment",¹ the editors of the *Vygotsky Reader* left the term intact alongside its approximate translation as *emotional experience*, an issue I return to later in this chapter.

Perezhivanie appears to capture an essential part of the cultural-historical approach to development. However, the temporal, cultural, sociopolitical and linguistic gaps that separate Vygotsky from his Western audiences have led to divergent interpretations of the concept. Vygotsky passed away before fully developing and integrating perezhivanie into his broader theoretical system. Thus, the task has fallen to Vygotskian scholars, who have situated the concept alongside different facets of his larger body of work, resulting in the emphasis of different aspects of the concept. It is the purpose of this introductory chapter to elucidate these interpretations, drawing on the theoretical and philosophical lineage of Vygotsky's work where it has been overlooked, to lay a foundation for the conceptual clarification (in Part I, this volume), conceptual development (Part II, this volume), and empirical operationalisation (Part III, this volume) in following chapters.

To sketch the landscape of interpretations, I begin first with a history of the word itself in the Russian language, leading to its role in the work of Stanislavsky. Next, I elucidate one of the intellectual foundations from which Vygotsky's work emerges and, moving to Western interpretations, discuss attempts at both linguistic and conceptual translation. Finally, I discuss three aspects of Vygotsky's work (and work built on its foundations) that theorists have used to illuminate the concept of perezhivanie: his early interest in emotion in *The Psychology of Art*; in relation to the concepts of social situation of development and word-meaning; and within the context of Activity Theory. Each of these branches of interpretation and interconnection illuminates different facets of the concept of perezhivanie.

2.2 The Stanislavsky Connection

Though perezhivanie is an everyday Russian word, its theoretical meaning can be traced to Tolstoy. In *What is Art?* (1896/1996), Tolstoy describes the proper activity of art as the conscious expression of felt experience, such that others are *infected* by the art and experience (*perezhivayut*) the same emotions (p. 51). The theatre

¹Originally titled "Проблема среды в педологии" [The problem of environment in paedology].

director Stanislavsky likely drew on Tolstoy when attempting to legitimise acting as a kind of science, within the Stalinist political environment, by using the objective methodological language of “hard” sciences (Pitches 2005).

Stanislavsky used *perezhivanie* in at least three senses. First, it denoted the internal psychological side of acting, in opposition to *voploshchenie*, the external physiological side (Pitches 2005). Second, it described a form of theatre, the essence of which Stanislavsky sought to uncover so that actors could be trained to achieve it. In this context, *perezhivanie* is contrasted with *remeslo* (craftsmanship) and *predstavlenie* (representation). In the theatre of *perezhivanie*, the “life of the human spirit” is created by the actor anew with each performance, who is able to be present, active and completely engaged with the stage reality (Beck 2014, p. 216; Carnicke 2009, p. 136) and can thus be said to be truly experiencing the life of the character. By contrast, in the theatre of *remeslo*, clichés are used to convey emotion, while in *predstavlenie*, though the life of the character is experienced during rehearsal, fixed forms are often presented onstage. Third, *perezhivanie* refers to the tool—at least in Western interpretations (Carnicke 2009, Chap. 8)—for actors to achieve the theatre of *perezhivanie*. Since emotions are aroused by physical action, physical imitation is used to bring about the appropriate emotion, drawing on the actor’s real-life past experiences. Known as the *Method of Physical Actions*, this technique is often contrasted with the earlier technique of *Affective* (or *Emotional*) *Memory*, in which sensory impressions are recalled to generate the appropriate emotion (see Larlham 2014).²

The nature and extent of Stanislavsky’s influence on Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of *perezhivanie* is uncertain. Theorists have variously understood Vygotsky as either directly adapting the term (Brennan 2014; Hakkarainen 2010; Smagorinsky 2011a) or independently developing the concept (Burkitt 2002; van Oers 2012). Others have argued for similarities between Stanislavsky’s *understatement* and Vygotsky’s *sense* (Daniels 2010; Mahn and John-Steiner 2008). What is clear, however, is Vygotsky’s familiarity with theatre and the work of Stanislavsky: Vygotsky’s intellectual career began as a fine arts reviewer (van der Veer and Valsiner 1991); proceeding with his first major work, *The Psychology of Art*, a dissertation which attempted to lend the study of the psychology of aesthetic reaction a scientific credibility; and two years before his death, Vygotsky returned to issues of aesthetics and emotion in “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor’s Creative Work” (Vygotsky 1999), where Stanislavsky’s work is discussed at length. It is in part because of these works and interests that a connection—at least historical if not conceptual—is often drawn between Stanislavsky and Vygotsky.

²There is debate as to whether Stanislavsky revised the latter by substituting it with the former or if this narrative of his theoretical development is a Western invention (see Carnicke 2009, p. 150; Whyman 2008, pp. 62–63). Regardless, Stanislavsky is quoted as advising his students in the last months of his life that: “One must give actors various paths. One of these is the path of action. There is also another path; you can move from feeling to action, arousing feeling first” (Vinogradskaja, as cited in Carnicke 2009, p. 173), indicating that both techniques existed in parallel.

2.3 Reflection Theory and Dialectical Materialism

For understanding Vygotsky's conceptualisation of *perezhivanie*, it may be tempting to take his definition of the term in the *Psychological Dictionary* (Vygotsky and Varshava 1931; for a discussion, see Veresov, this volume) as a definitive answer. However, much like the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; see Chaiklin 2003; Valsiner and van der Veer 1993; Veresov 2004), further work is required to understand *perezhivanie*'s place within cultural-historical theory so that the core conceptual content and its methodological consequences can be separated from its use in specific examples and its use as a (mere) rhetorical device.

Take, for example, the metaphor of refraction used by Vygotsky to explain *perezhivanie*:

it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors *refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience* [*perezhivanie*] (emphasis added, p. 340)

Though the meaning of refraction in this context is often taken as self-evident, its philosophical and methodological significance can only be appreciated when understood as a continuation and specification of the Leninist theory of reflection that, at the time of Vygotsky's writing, had become a central tenet of Soviet philosophy. Given the complexity of this theory, only an abridged account of this theory's development can be provided here.

The posthumous publication of Lenin's conspectus of Hegel's *The Science of Logic* in 1929 (in *Lenin Miscellanies IX*; republished in *Philosophical Notebooks* from 1933) occasioned renewed interest in reflection theory. In these notes, Lenin reformulated his earlier "mirror-copy" version of reflection theory in dialectical materialist terms. This was inspired through a *materialistic* reading of Hegel's dialectic *idealism*, and through drawing connections to Marx's earlier materialistic inversion of Hegel for Marx's work on economic theory (Anderson 1995). According to this version of reflection theory, consciousness (for which Lenin uses the term "sensation"; Kirschenmann 1970, p. 95) and reality are understood in a dialectical manner, as two parts connected in a unity rather than being truly distinct. Rather than accessing reality from the outside, as it were, consciousness and reality in fact transform into each other, constantly in movement and/or contradiction. It is through what we term cognition that reality is transformed into consciousness; and conversely, through practical activity, consciousness is transformed into reality. Indeed, this material basis for consciousness is also established as a general property of *all* matter (see Lenin 1909/2014, Sects. 1.1 and 1.5): all matter (inorganic, organic, living) in some way *reflects* the conditions that gave rise to its specific organisation (the objects/phenomena that have acted upon it); consciousness is merely the form that reflection takes when matter takes on a highly complex organisation (Anderson 1995; Kirschenmann 1970; Payne 1968; Sayers 1985, Chap. 1).

The rationale for Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory is the need to create an intermediary language to translate between "the most general, maximally universal science" (Vygotsky 1997, p. 330) of dialectics, and the concrete subject matter of psychology. While there existed a "Marxist psychology" at the time, Vygotsky argued it was a blind application of dialectical materialism that, therefore, could provide no insights about psychology in particular: "we cannot ... study the psychological differences between people with a concept that covers both the solar system, a tree, and man" (p. 329). With this in mind, we can thus view his refraction metaphor as a specification of the general philosophical thesis of reflection to account for issues particular to psychology. It is in refraction, but not reflection, that the concrete and productive contribution of consciousness in determining (or perhaps in cultural-historical terms, *mediating*) the developmental effect of the environment can be taken into account (in Part III, this volume, it is argued that this idea is further developed through the concepts of subjective configuration and subjective sense). Mirrors do not themselves require further analysis if their images are exact reflections, but since consciousness is part of the reality that is "reflected", then consciousness itself (the prism) needs to be accounted for in any concept used to analyse the effect of the environment (the light reflected) on human mental development (for further discussion of the prism metaphor, see Veresov, this volume). It is in this sense that the environment can be understood as being refracted through the individual. Indeed, the reverse is true: there is also a refraction when consciousness transforms into reality through practical activity (Sayers 1985, Chap. 1), an idea that is mirrored in the "activity system" unit of analysis in Activity Theory, in which human activity is shaped by available mediating artefacts and social organisation.

The philosophical heritage of this element of the perekhivanie concept is often overlooked in Western interpretations of Vygotsky's work. Understanding the basis of refraction in reflection theory sheds light not only on the context within and philosophical bases from which Vygotsky constructed his cultural-historical theory, but also on the ways in which he translated general philosophical tenets for psychology. The following section provides an overview of some of the attempts at linguistic and conceptual translation by Western audiences.

2.4 Linguistic and Conceptual Translation

One path to understanding perekhivanie in the West has been to seek an appropriate translation to convey the sense of the concept in familiar terms. This, however, has proven difficult. Stanislavsky's translators have variously used "the art of living a part", "to live the scene", "sensations", "living and experiencing", "experience", "experiencing", "emotional experience", "creation" and "re-living/living through a role" (Carnicke 2009, Chap. 7) for the conceptualisation of perekhivanie in acting theory. Meanwhile, Vygotsky's translators have used "experience" (in "The Crisis at Age Seven", Vygotsky 1998), "lived experience" (drawing on the German

equivalent, *Erlebnis*; Blunden 2009), “inner experience” (Zavershneva 2010) and “emotional experience” (in “The Problem of the Environment”, Vygotsky 1994). Researchers have also used “intensely-emotional-lived-through-experience” (Ferholt 2010, p. 164) and “experiencing” (in Leontiev 2005, translated by Favorov). A complication particular to Vygotsky’s *Collected Works* is that it is unclear when “experience” is translated from *perezhivanie* and when it is from *opyt* (referring to an accumulated body of knowledge/skills). Even if the original term were identified as *perezhivanie*, it would still be necessary to discern whether it was used with its everyday or technical meaning.

Scholars from other language backgrounds have also sought translations in their own languages. González Rey (2009b) uses the Spanish *vivencias* as a direct translation of *perezhivanie*, Sato (2010) draws parallels with the Japanese philosopher Mori’s concept of *keiken*, and the editors of the *Vygotsky Reader* (1994, R. van der Veer and J. Valsiner Eds.) suggest a similarity to the German *erleben*, drawing comparisons to Dilthey’s concept of *Erlebnis* (which can be traced back to Goethe, with whom Vygotsky was also familiar).

Parallels have also been drawn to the conceptual languages of other theoretical and philosophical frameworks. For example, Vygotsky and Dewey have been linked in various ways: Blunden (2009) argues that Dewey’s *experience* is “more or less similar” to *perezhivanie*, while Glassman (2001) proposes a similarity between Dewey’s *experience* and Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of *culture*. Others (Clarà 2013; Jóhannsdóttir and Roth 2014; Roth and Jornet 2014) have proposed fundamental similarities between Vygotsky and Dewey (e.g. the shared basis in Hegelian philosophy) that allow for mutual theoretical enrichment.

As Roth and Jornet (2013, 2014) have argued, Dewey’s and Vygotsky’s theories of experience and *perezhivanie*, respectively, share essential characteristics. For both Dewey and Vygotsky, experience (*perezhivanie*) is a category (i.e. a minimal unit of analysis) of thinking that defines the indeterminate and emergent aspects of practical activity and interaction that are difficult, if not impossible, to predict from the outset. While *an* experience denotes a completed and temporally discrete event known and understandable only in retrospect, *experience/perezhivanie* refers to the ongoing transaction of that activity, the interplay between practical, intellectual, affective and situational aspects, that affects the individuals involved. It is transactional, Roth and Jornet argue, precisely because they construct each other and feed back into the situation (e.g. manifesting itself to participants), transforming the course of the activity as the activity itself emerges. Thus, it is the purpose of the category of experience/*perezhivanie* to capture these indeterminate aspects together in an irreducible, integral entity as they are coming into being, rather than when they have done so. Experience/*perezhivanie*, therefore, provides the starting point for a more holistic (i.e. non-reductive) and concrete analysis of learning, an examination of how/which experiences become developmentally significant. By contrast, Razfar (2013) argues that many aspects of both theories—their ideologies, philosophies and ontologies—do not align, which, at best, requires a re-examination of their similarities, and at worst, entails their incommensurability.

The idea that the developmental significance of an environment can only be understood in relation to a specific individual's characteristics is also present in Gibson's (1979/1986) notion of *affordances* (for a history of the concept, see Jones 2003). An affordance refers to what a particular object offers an individual, defined in relation to that individual with their specific capacities and capabilities. Thus, a set of steps affords ascent, but not for an infant who has not yet learned to walk. For both Vygotsky and Gibson, the conception of learning moves beyond the transfer paradigm—in which learning is the acquisition of knowledge—and towards a situated cognition view in which learning is expanding action possibilities (i.e. affordances) in larger systems of activity (Roth and Jornet 2013). As with Dewey, the links drawn between Vygotsky and Gibson vary.

Van Lier (2000, 2004, 2008) connects affordances with Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory more generally in his ecological approach to language learning, though without using the term "perezhivanie" explicitly. Daniels (2010) links affordances to Vygotsky's *social situation of development*, arguing that Vygotsky provides the understanding of psychological formation that is missing in Gibson's work. By contrast, Michell (2012) argues that Gibson's understanding of perception as being direct and unmediated is incommensurable with Vygotsky's view that it is indirect and sign-mediated, differentiated and complexified through cultural mediation. Where for Gibson, individuals see new affordances through adaptation (becoming better attuned to already-existing affordances of value-rich ecological objects), for Vygotsky, it is through transformation (*perception itself* changes through mediation).

Much like metaphors, these efforts towards linguistic and conceptual translation have been useful for illuminating facets of the perezhivanie concept. However, it is in examining the concept in the context of Vygotsky's larger body of work that crucial connections, to both the purpose and constituent concepts of cultural-historical theory, can be made.

2.5 Perezhivanie in Context

In this section, I look at three approaches to contextualising perezhivanie: in relation to Vygotsky's early work on art, aesthetics and emotional psychology; other cultural-historical concepts; and in activity-theoretic terms. An overview of these approaches provides a guide to the refinements and operationalisations of the concept post-Vygotsky.

2.5.1 Art, Aesthetics, and Emotional Psychology

Theorists who examine perezhivanie through the context of Vygotsky's earlier work tend to view perezhivanie as a return to interests in intelligent emotional processes with the benefit of a more developed understanding of psychology. In this

context, Vygotsky's better known "instrumental period", in which the internalisation of object-mediated activity was central (González Rey 2009a), is viewed as having overlooked the role of emotion. *Perezhivanie*, then, is seen as a concept that restores the role of emotion and affect to psychological development research, allowing for a more holistic view of consciousness, and shifting focus from the unit of the instrumental act to the unit of the psychological system (Daniels 2010). Capturing the unity of thought and emotion (Brennan 2014; Chen 2014; Fleer and Hammer 2013; Gajdamaschko 2006),³ *perezhivanie* avoids simple categorisation of mental processes as either cognitive or affective, thus avoiding the need to propose extraneous interactions to explain their relation to each other. Rather, thought and emotion are deeply and inherently interconnected, an idea Vygotsky (1987) made explicit when he wrote that "thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness" (p. 282), and which is supported by modern neurobiological research (see, e.g. Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007).

The view that *perezhivanie* is a return to an earlier interest in emotion (González Rey 2009a; Vadeboncoeur and Collie 2013) leads to a view of *perezhivanie* as a process at the end of which an object comes to take on a developmental significance. This line of thought begins with Vygotsky's (1971) *The Psychology of Art*, particularly his work on catharsis, draws on Stanislavsky's understanding of *perezhivanie* as a tool for actors, continues with Vasilyuk's (1991) theoretical developments and reflects the connotations of the word in everyday Russian.

According to Benedetti (2007), Stanislavsky used *perezhivanie* to denote a tool, "the process by which an actor engages actively with the situation in each and every performance" (p. xviii). More specifically, it can be used to describe the re-living of past-lived experiences as a means to engage with and convey emotional subtext (Robbins, 1 December 2007). This conceptualisation likely informed Vygotsky's (1971) understanding of catharsis in *The Psychology of Art*. In the experience of and engagement with art, "intelligent emotions"—emotional responses elevated by one's imagination (Smagorinsky 2011a)—can be provoked. Here, *perezhivanie* captures the role of affect in interpreting one's experience. It refers to a "meta-experience" (Smagorinsky and Daigle 2012), an experience of experience that is both cognitive and emotional. Since what counts as an appropriate expression of a particular emotion is socially situated and conventional rather than innate, this meta-experience is also grounded in shared cultural experience (Smagorinsky 2011a). Through this meta-experience, an individual can deeply reflect on and have a raised awareness of past-experiences, leading to tensions between conflicting emotions—what Veresov (2014) has identified as "dramatic collision"—that are resolved in catharsis. It is in catharsis that there is an explosive discharge of emotion and a generalisation of personal emotions to a "higher plane of experience"

³Blunden (2014) clarifies that the unity to which *perezhivanie* refers is an original, rather than synthetic, unity. That is, it is not a concept that combines two abstractions—thought and affect—but is in fact a concept that names the already existing unity, from which those very abstractions have been made. This also aligns with Dewey's notion of an experience as being an original unity (see Blunden 2009).

(Smagorinsky 2011a, p. 332), transforming an individual's perception of themselves, others and the world (Cross 2012; Marjanovic-Shane et al. 2010). In the same way that Stanislavsky's actor engages with the situation in each performance, so too does Vygotsky's viewer engage with art at each viewing: in both cases, past experience can be re-experienced. Thus, Smagorinsky (2011a) argues, Vygotsky sees the dramatic nature of art in the development of personality, and the psychological nature of personality in art, both of which are required for understanding the development of consciousness. It is likely for this reason that the notion of drama in art was later used to characterise the internal and external conflicts of everyday life that lead to a different kind of catharsis and generalisation: human mental development. That is, human mental development as the resolution of "drama" in the domain of psychology is analogous to catharsis as the resolution of emotional conflict in the experience of art.

Vasilyuk is, in the literature, assumed to have elaborated Vygotsky's perekhivanie (Clarà 2013), defining the concept as "*a special inner activity or inner work*" (Vasilyuk 1991, p. 15) in which an individual withstands, overcomes and copes with a (usually painful) critical event or situation in life—a crisis—integrating it into their personality, which constitutes development (Blunden 2014; Levykh 2008a; Sannino 2008).⁴ This conceptualisation of perekhivanie as a mental activity echoes Stanislavsky's notion of perekhivanie as a tool in which past-lived experience is re-lived on stage. It also aligns with Vygotsky's perekhivanie in catharsis, though contrasts with his later view of perekhivanie as a mental "representation of me-in-the-environment" (Clarà 2015, p. 40). For this reason, Blunden (2014) has suggested that using "'perekhivanie' for the experience and 'catharsis' for the working over" (p. 22)—the latter being necessary for development following a crisis.

2.5.1.1 The Primacy of Emotion

This particular understanding of perekhivanie as being informed by Stanislavsky raises two issues. The first is that the resulting operationalisation of perekhivanie strongly emphasises emotion. This is particularly evident of work following Mahn and John-Steiner (2008; see, e.g. Abdul Rahim et al. 2009; Antoniadou 2011; Blair 2009; Cross 2012; Dormann et al. 2013; Garratt 2012; Golombek and Doran 2014; Mi-Song 2010), who revitalised the concept for investigating how the building and sustaining of confidence in interaction supports learning. For Mahn and John-Steiner (2008), perekhivanie describes the affective and emotional lens through which interactions in the ZPD are perceived, represented and appropriated. This is supported, as stated earlier, by Vygotsky's conceptualisation of emotions as

⁴This understanding of perekhivanie as only what is developmentally significant (here, a crisis that has been overcome) draws with parallels with Dewey's concept of *an* experience (as opposed to the *category* of experience, discussed above).

forming part of the “sphere of consciousness within which all other mental activity occurs” (Beatty and Brew 2004, p. 330). Indeed, emotion permeates all aspects of consciousness, as “every idea contains some remnant of the individual’s affective relationship to that aspect of reality which it represents” (Vygotsky 1987, p. 50).⁵

Though useful for restoring balance to an otherwise cognition-dominant approach to research, there is the risk of this kind of interpretation leading to a reduction of perezhivanie to only emotion, when Vygotsky’s anti-reductionism (see, e.g. Matusov 2007) makes clear that perezhivanie is to be holistic and synchronic (i.e. for understanding at a particular point in time). In the case of second language learning, for example, a learner may lack the confidence to take the kinds of risks that allow for further practice and language development. This lack of confidence is not purely affective, but may be intimately linked to cognitive ability (including motor skills), self-perception of their abilities and their manifestations in concrete situations (e.g. a moment of nervousness or distraction may influence a learner’s confidence), among other aspects. As Vygotsky (1994) writes:

what is important for us to find out is which [of the child’s] constitutional characteristics have played a decisive role in determining the child’s relationship to a given situation ... in another situation, different constitutional characteristics may well have played a role. (emphasis in original, p. 342)

That is, though the pervasiveness of emotion (whether or not differentiated from affect) makes it important in an understanding of the individual–environment relationship, there is a crucial difference between presuming the primacy of emotion in a given perezhivanie *before* analysis (e.g. via “investment”, Andoniadou 2011; confidence, Blair 2009; motives, Clarà 2013; or mood and stance, Stone and Thompson 2014) and establishing its centrality *after* analysis. Though needs and desires may motivate particular behaviours and subsequently frame experience, it is not necessarily emotion—only one of many aspects of the psyche—that plays the “decisive role” in determining perezhivanie.

This is why in Vygotsky’s (1994) discussion, the perezhivanie of different children appear to be characterised by different salient characteristics. In the example of three children under the care of their sometimes-abusive mother, the youngest child is *overwhelmed*, the second child has a simultaneously positive and negative *attitude* to the mother, and the eldest child’s precocious maturity is explained by his ability to *understand* the situation. In another case, a child who is unable to *comprehend* the bullying occurring to him is consequently unaffected by it, and in another, a hypothetical child whose linguistic generalisations are concrete rather than conceptual “interprets and imagines the surrounding reality and environment in a different way” (p. 345). Thus, it is clear that the “decisive” determinant of a given child’s perezhivanie is a matter of empirical discovery. Through subsequent analysis, the extent to which this psychological determinant has developed in the individual can also be investigated.

⁵It is worth noting that this statement echoes the dialectical law of reflection discussed above, wherein an object reflects within it the processes that gave rise to it.

Theorists who have assumed the primacy of emotion in understanding perezhivanie have also drawn on related words in everyday Russian for understanding the particular kind of emotion that is relevant. Echoing Vasilyuk, it is, in general, argued that perezhivanie refers specifically to the overcoming of an *emotionally negative* experience (see, e.g. Levykh 2008a; Robbins, 1 December 2007), though Kotik-Friedgut (2 December 2007) argues it can refer also to emotionally *positive* experiences (e.g. happiness, victory). Other examples of words with the *pere-* prefix in Russian suggest a broader, sometimes affectively neutral meaning, indicating movement or transition (Veresov, personal communication).⁶ Similarly, Roth and Jornet (2014) trace the Proto-Indo-European root *per(e)-* to verbs indicating various senses such as: to dare, put at risk, try (as in “*experiment*”), to put oneself in danger (as in “*perilous*”) and limit (as in “*perimeter*”).

In these contexts, perezhivanie refers to the overcoming of a particular kind of emotional experience. However, another interpretation is possible: if perezhivanie is understood dialectically as a struggle between contradictory forces (e.g. between individual capabilities and environmental demands), then it is this struggle itself that is emotional(ly negative), both in its genesis (the experience of the contradiction/dissonance) and its resolution (as the new development contains an emotional imprint of the process of its coming to being; Levykh 2008b).

In this section, I have provided an overview of a range of interpretations of perezhivanie as focusing on emotion in experience (not to be confused with more general issues of emotional development; see Part II, this volume). The extent to which non-technical connotations of the perezhivanie informs, or should inform, its technical usage is a matter for further discussion beyond the scope of this chapter. In the next section I examine understandings of perezhivanie as a component in Vygotsky’s system of concepts.

2.5.2 *Perezhivanie’s Relation to Other Cultural-Historical Concepts*

A second approach to understanding perezhivanie is to view it alongside other cultural-historical concepts such as the *social situation of development*, and word-meaning and *sense*. Since Vygotsky was unable to fully explicate the relationship between these concepts, it has been the task of researchers following in his footsteps to do so.

⁶For example: *perekrestok* (crossroads), *peregruzhen* (overloaded), *perepolnen* (overcrowded), *peremeshchenie* (transition), and *perestroika* (reconstruction).

2.5.2.1 Social Situation of Development

The concepts of *perezhivanie* and social situation of development both conceptualise a dynamic relationship between the individual and their environment. Thus, to understand the relationship between these concepts—their origins, similarities and differences—illuminates the conceptual content of both (see, e.g. Veresov, this volume, for a more substantial analysis of this content), and their places within Vygotsky’s theoretical system. Vygotsky had, at best, only implied a connection between the two concepts. In discussing “the problem of age”, Vygotsky (1998) wrote: “one of the major impediments to the theoretical and practical study of child development is the incorrect solution of *the problem of the environment* and its role in the dynamics of age (emphasis added, p. 198). It is the phrase “the problem of the environment”, that alludes to the subject of his later lecture in which *perezhivanie* is explicated. However, in specifying that he seeks to understand the problem of the environment in the specific context of its role in the “dynamics of age”, he goes on to define “the social situation of development”, providing a crucial clue for understanding how *perezhivanie* and social situation of development are related.

The social situation of development captures a *dynamic* relation because it defines a set of relations between the child/individual and their environment such that, if either change, then so too, does the social situation of development. Conceptually, it is used to delineate psychological age periods, which are book-ended and defined by the emergence and (completed) development of a particular psychological functions (or set of functions), or aspect(s) of personality (either of which constitute the “neof ormation” of that period). Additionally, the social situation of development specifies a culturally particular relation between the child/individual and their social reality defined by two crucial aspects of the age period. First, there is contradiction (e.g. between social demands/norms/requirements and the abilities/needs/desires of the individual) that constitutes the motivating force for development. Second, within this particular relation, the child encounters the *ideal form* of development—the psychological function expected to develop—the completed development of which both resolves the contradiction and also, therefore, marks the end of the age period (Bozhovich 2009; Karabanova 2010; Vygotsky 1998). Subsequently, a new period begins marked by a new contradiction, new ideal form, and overall, a new child–environment relationship (e.g. the child can now use speech to communicate their needs)—that is, a new social situation of development.

Bozhovich’s (2009) research has explicitly connected the social situation of development and *perezhivanie* concepts, with many researchers maintaining her distinction (at least conceptually, if not terminologically; Daniels 2010; Esteban-Guitart and Moll 2014; Fler and Pramling 2015; Grimmet 2014). From the perspective of Activity Theory, Bozhovich rejects Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of *perezhivanie*, instead substituting the term “internal position”, which is in contrast to “objective/external position” (the social situation of development). The latter refers to the imposed demands and afforded resources of a social context,

while the former refers to the individual's own needs and desires. It is when an external position aligns with an internal position (e.g. a child is required to communicate using speech, and also has the desire to do so) that it serves as a "true factor" in development. Thus, the external position (social situation of development) is mediated—refracted—through the psychological system of the individual (internal position).⁷ Following Bozhovich, researchers have argued for perezhivanie as a unit of analysis for investigating development within the social situation of development (Adams and Fleer 2015; Bozhovich 2009; González Rey 2009a; Grimmet 2014). However, it should not be misunderstood as applying *only* to understanding the social situation of development. Rather, perezhivanie is best understood as a unit—or perhaps more appropriately, stable "reference point" (Brennan 2014, p. 288)—for conceptualising the developmental role of the environment in general, of which the social situation of development is a particular kind, useful for characterising psychological age.

That is, though social situation of development and perezhivanie concepts share some similarities, they serve distinct analytical purposes. The social situation of development characterises relations between *children* within a particular culture and the cultural environment itself. Thus, theorisation grounded in this concept relates to *normative* claims about, for example, the expected neoformations and particular contradictions that characterise a specific age period for a particular culture. To investigate the progress, process, and course of development of a particular child, however, requires the use of the perezhivanie concept, in which the actual interactions between child and their environment (regardless of whether this is characterised as a social situation of development) are crystallised, reflecting that child's past and current experiences, personality, attitudes and so on, as manifest in a concrete situation (see, e.g. Fleer and Pramling 2015). Indeed, as Vygotsky (1998) writes: "the forces of the environment acquire a controlling significance because the child experiences them" (p. 294).⁸ These "forces of the environment" can be characterised in terms of a social situation of development—in which case, analysis provides an understanding both of the individual and of normative

⁷It is unclear, however, whether the external and internal positions are both components of the social situation of development (as Karabanova 2010, has argued), or whether social situation of development only refers to external position.

⁸Karabanova (2010) gives a different translation as: "child's attitude to surroundings, and vice versa, the way surroundings affect a child, are regarded through his emotional experience and activity, thus surroundings acquire a leading force through child's perception"; while in the original Russian, it is "что среда определяет развитие ребенка через переживание [perezhivanie] среды... отношение ребенка к среде и среды к ребенку дается через переживание [perezhivanie] и деятельность самого ребенка; силы среды приобретают направляющее значение благодаря переживанию [perezhivaniyu] ребенка" (Vygotsky 1984, p. 383).

psychological age periods, that is, of *actual* development relative to *potential* neoformations—but it would be equally valid not to do so.⁹

To sum: though the concepts of social situation of development and perezhivanie are mutually informing, they characterise the child–environment relationship for different purposes and from different perspectives. The former, generally speaking, allows for theorisation of what is potential and culturally expected, while the latter reveals what is actually occurring. In a broader sense, we can see that the concepts are applications of the language of cultural-historical theory to particular issues (culturally constructed psychological age periods, and consciousness, respectively), in much the same way that cultural-historical theory is itself a specification of dialectical materialism for psychology.

2.5.2.2 (Word-)Meaning and Sense

In another of Vygotsky’s well known works, *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky 1987), the unit of word-meaning provides the basis for understanding the development of verbal thought (i.e. thought mediated by the sign system of language). For many researchers, this work has provided insight into Vygotsky’s thoughts on the development of consciousness, and thus by extension, the concept of perezhivanie. This connection can be made for a number of reasons.

First, they are methodologically analogous. Both concepts are described as units of analysis: empirically discoverable parts of the whole. Understanding how word-meaning is used to inform an understanding of the development of verbal thought should also provide insight into the way in which perezhivanie relates to and provides insight into, the development of consciousness (Valsiner and van der Veer 1993).

Second, two of the chapters of *Thinking and Speech* that elaborate the unit of word-meaning were written around the time (circa 1934) Vygotsky was also developing perezhivanie. It is likely, then, that the two concepts were either parts of a new approach to understanding psychological development, or two connected points in a singular line of inquiry. González Rey (2009a), for example, has argued that this phase in Vygotsky’s work¹⁰ was leading toward the development of the psychological concept of *sense* (which appears briefly in the last chapter of *Thinking and Speech*).

⁹This distinction between the investigation of potential/expected (social situation of development) and actually manifest (perezhivanie) development is, of course, identified in Bozhovich’s distinction between external and internal position, respectively. However, her characterisation of Vygotsky’s perezhivanie appears at odds with Vygotsky’s intended conceptualisation, for reasons discussed in the last section of this chapter. Thus, I have instead borrowed terminology from Chaiklin’s (2003) discussion of the ZPD, in which he distinguishes *objective/normative* (corresponding to the social situation of development) and *subjective* (corresponding to what a child can actually imitate and thus what is actually developmentally significant) ZPDs.

¹⁰From examining the Vygotsky family archives, Zavershneva (2010) ascertains that this new period in Vygotsky’s thinking began “not later than July 1932” (p. 52).

Third, in concluding *Thinking and Speech* (1987), Vygotsky suggests that what lies beyond of the scope of the book is “a more general problem, the problem of the relationship between the word and consciousness” (p. 285), that is, language in the larger context of “the motivating sphere of consciousness” (p. 282). The same concluding chapter makes reference to Stanislavsky, suggesting that Vygotsky had either begun developing perezhivanie or had the seeds of the concept in mind.

A final link can be found in “The problem of consciousness” (Vygotsky 1997, Chap. 9), notes of Vygotsky’s talks that mirror the structure of *Thinking and Speech*. In it, perezhivanie is linked to meaning and his work on verbal thought when Vygotsky identifies “the relation between activity and emotional experience [*perezhivaniyu*] (the problem of meaning)” (p. 130)¹¹ as an issue to be addressed in his work.

As with the concept itself, there are multiple interpretations of the manner in which perezhivanie relates to Vygotsky’s discussion of word-meaning. Before examining some of these interpretations, it is necessary first to address issues in understanding word-meaning itself.

2.5.2.3 A Note on the Meaning of (Word-)Meaning

Of particular interest are at least two unstated interpretations of the relationship between word-meaning (*znacheniya slova*) and *meaning* (*znacheniya*) that are differently assumed by theorists: either word-meaning and meaning are equivalent (as with works following Mahn and John-Steiner 2000, 2008; e.g. Cross 2012), or word-meaning is a larger whole of which meaning (understood as lexical definition) is a part, (e.g. Robbins 2001, Chap. 3).¹² The consequences of these two

¹¹Otnosheniye deyatelnosti k perezhivaniyu (problema znacheniya).

¹²Support for the first interpretation can be found in Vygotsky’s (1997) notes, when he alludes to this distinction: “Meaning [*znachenie*] is not the sum of all the psychological operations which stand behind the word [i.e. not *sense*, as defined in *Thinking and Speech*]. Meaning is something more specific—it is the internal structure of the sign operation” (p. 133). However, it is nonetheless evident that while Vygotsky uses Paulhan’s meaning and sense distinction in *Thinking and Speech*, he disagrees with Paulhan’s characterisation of meaning: “Word meaning is not a simple thing given once and for all (against Paulhan)” (p. 138). Therefore, Vygotsky either uses Paulhan’s *meaning* with a different definition, or subsumes both meaning (redefined as lexical definition) and sense within his own word-meaning construct. Indeed, Vygotsky (1987) writes that: “The actual meaning of the word [*znachenie slova*] is inconstant Isolated in the lexicon, the word has only one meaning [*znachenie*]. However, this meaning [*znachenie*] is nothing more than a potential that can only be realised in living speech ...” (p. 276). A possible interpretation of this apparently contradictory statement is that word-meaning is inconstant because it changes when the potential, abstract lexical meanings (i.e. dictionary definitions) of words are made concrete (i.e. used to refer to specific objects of discussion, rather than the entire class of objects to which a lexical definition would refer) in actual speech, and thus change from one context to another (including in inner/private speech contexts).

interpretations relate to other statements in *Thinking and Speech*. First, meaning is described as a relatively stable zone *within* sense,¹³ “the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word” (Vygotsky 1987, pp. 275–276). Second, in inner speech—highly abbreviated, non-verbalised, self-directed speech—sense predominates over meaning. Finally, word-meaning is described as existing on the plane of verbal thought (rather than, for example, the deeper and broader planes of thought or consciousness).

Where word-meaning and meaning are equivalent, it follows that sense and inner speech are associated with a broader plane than verbal thought—that is, consciousness—from which other psychological facts (e.g. emotion and personality) can be elicited by the word. Where word-meaning and meaning are differentiated, then both sense and meaning can be understood as parts of word-meaning, which, together with inner speech, are all situated on the plane of verbal thought. Though sense draws its “psychological facts” from beyond word-meaning in consciousness (e.g. motives; Vygotsky 1997, p. 136), it is nonetheless “contained” within word-meaning. This disagreement potentially stems from issues in translation. For example, it is unclear in the original Russian manuscript, except to proficient Russian speakers, whether *znacheniya slova* is best understood as (a word’s) *meaning* or word-meaning. Additionally, the use of “word” in “word-meaning” is likely a synecdoche (Kozulin 1990, p. 151; or, similarly, a metaphor, Robbins 2001, Chap. 3)—that refers to language and its psychological and semantic structure as a whole, not particular words, which may confuse some readers unfamiliar with Vygotsky’s writing style.

The context of writing also warrants consideration: the fifth and seventh chapters of *Thinking and Speech*, which focus on (word-)meaning, were written three years apart (in 1931 and 1934, respectively), during which Vygotsky apparently embarked on a new direction in his research (González Rey 2009a).¹⁴ Thus it is possible that the use of (word-)meaning is not necessarily consistent across these chapters. Indeed, in the fifth chapter, word-meaning is distinguished from

¹³The origins of the meaning–sense distinction in the work of Paulhan raise two further questions. The first is whether the distinction was fully developed and understood by Paulhan himself, as it is disregarded as being insignificant in his later work (Kellogg, 12 February 2015). The second is whether Vygotsky’s usage of the distinction is in fact better explained as originating from the work of Volosinov (who distinguished between *thema* and *meaning*, corresponding roughly to actual and potential meaning, respectively), whose work was closely read by Vygotsky (Kellogg, 11 February 2015).

¹⁴The new direction for research can possibly be traced back to notes written on the back of library cards, examined by Zavershneva (2010), that reveal Vygotsky’s intention to begin to direct his attention inwards, to investigate the dynamics of meanings by way of “semic analysis” (p. 42).

object-relatedness¹⁵ from a functional perspective, in relation to the development of conceptual thinking in children, and strongly reflects Frege's distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*), respectively (Wertsch 1978, p. 20), though Vygotsky does not make this connection explicit.¹⁶ By contrast, in the seventh and final chapter, Vygotsky's discussion is structural and in the context of fully developed conceptual thinking and inner speech. Here, he draws on Paulhan, either to further refine his own definition of word-meaning by contrasting it with sense, or to introduce a new distinction within word-meaning itself.¹⁷ Having made explicit the issues in interpreting word-meaning, we can now return to the present task of connecting the concept with perezhivanie.

2.5.2.4 Word-Meaning and Perezhivanie

Perhaps the most tantalising statement connecting word-meaning and perezhivanie is one that appears at the end of *Thinking and Speech*: "the word is a microcosm of consciousness, related to consciousness like a living cell is related to an organism, like an atom is related to the cosmos. The meaningful word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (Vygotsky 1987, p. 285). As with many other aspects of Vygotsky's work discussed in this chapter, differing interpretations of this connection have emerged. In this case, these differences appear to align with differing understandings of the term "microcosm".

On one interpretation, word-meaning is a microcosm of human consciousness *en toto* (Leitch 2011). That is, word-meaning is the unit that captures the structures and contents of consciousness, thereby reflecting an individual's concrete lived experience (e.g. the meaning and significance ascribed to an experience; e.g. Fleer 2013), and thus is able to serve as a unit for analysing consciousness (Connery 2006; Leitch 2011). This interpretation is premised on the constitutive role that

¹⁵Vygotsky (1987) later quotes R.Shor: "in what is commonly called word meaning, we must distinguish two features...the meaning of the expression...and its object relatedness" (p. 152). This can be differently interpreted as making a distinction between: (1) two parts *within* word-meaning; (2) two *functions* of or within word-meaning (i.e. nomination/indication and signification); (3) the whole (where meaning means word-meaning) against a part (object relatedness) of itself; (4) lexical definition and object-relatedness, both of which are parts of word-meaning; or (5) between structure (meaning) and a function (object relatedness).

¹⁶Additionally, both Frege's *sense* and Vygotsky's word-meaning are, respectively, described as the *mode* of presentation.

¹⁷Before the writing of the last chapter, Vygotsky (1987) has either not distinguished between sense and meaning, or has taken the two terms to be contained within word-meaning, for example: "We were able... to observe how that which is perceived is isolated and synthesised, how it becomes the *sense or meaning* of the word, how it becomes a concept" (emphasis added, p. 164) and "the greatest difficulty for the adolescent and one that he overcomes only at the end of the transitional age is the further transfer of the *sense or meaning* of the developed concept to new concrete situations" (emphasis added, p. 161).

Vygotsky assigns to language. Through activities such as speech, the meaning inherent in signs (i.e. language) generates sense, which either constitutes consciousness or effects interfunctional change (i.e. between processes of consciousness) within it (Vygotsky 1997, Chap. 9). As a result, this sense-creating activity of meanings is said to create the semantic structure of consciousness (Vygotsky 1997, Chap. 9), with word-meaning becoming the locus of thinking (Leitch 2011), mediating the entirety of consciousness (and not merely its expression in speech; Michell 2012). As Vygotsky wrote in notes from 1932: “The first word is a change in consciousness long before a change in thinking” (Zavershneva 2010, p. 44). Accordingly, in this context, *perezhivanie* is understood as an abstracted construct reflecting the larger system of the individual-in-environment (Connery 2006). To borrow Connery’s (2006) metaphor, the window of word-meaning permits insight to the house of *perezhivanie*. However, Zinchenko (1985) has argued word-meaning is insufficient as a complete unit of analysis as it does not also contain the motive force for its transformation (motives, needs, desires, etc.), which, indeed, Vygotsky had argued lay beyond the plane thinking (and therefore, word-meaning), in the realm of consciousness.

On another interpretation, word-meaning is understood as a particular “privileged case” (Wertsch 1985 p. 194) of the semiotic organisation of consciousness (Vygotsky 1987, p. 43). That is, word-meaning, as a part of consciousness, is characterised by the same kind of generalisation and semiotic organisation that exists in the broader whole of consciousness. It should be clarified that, in this context, generalisation is not understood as in the context of verbal thought (i.e. forming abstracted concepts), but instead as the “exclusion from visual structures and the inclusion in thought structures, in semantic structures” (Vygotsky 1997, p. 138). Generalisation is thus a kind of abstraction from reality, shaped and determined by the activity of one’s consciousness (Vygotsky 1997, Chap. 9). Thus, generalisation as a general principle explains not only the process by which concepts are formed in verbal thought, but also explains the non-intellectual means by which features of the environment can be said to be significant (or not) for an individual. While the meaning of a situation can be grasped at the *intellectual* level (e.g. to consciously understand), other factors such as an individual’s current stage of development, needs, desires, abilities and attitudes can also make a situation “meaningful” to that individual in a non-intellectual (i.e. non-conscious) sense (Blunden 2014). As Vygotsky (1997) writes: “Meaning does not belong to thinking but to consciousness as a whole” (p. 138).¹⁸ On this interpretation, the process of generalisation found within word-meaning on the plane of thought (which leads to an investigation limited to thinking; Smagorinsky 2011b) is a particular example of generalisation that, on the plane of consciousness, is found in *perezhivanie*. Where word-meaning is understood to be subsumed within sense, it is also possible to

¹⁸Note that this quote from Vygotsky also supports the first interpretation of word-meaning as a unit of analysis for consciousness *en toto*: the meaning attached to signs shapes consciousness.

interpret sense as being equivalent to (or even beyond) *perekhivanie*, as González Rey (2009a) and Lantolf (2000) have argued.

Further insight into this issue can be found in examining Vygotsky's use of the term "microcosm". Though not often used, it appears in "The historical meaning of the crisis in psychology" (Vygotsky 1997, Chap. 15), in an argument for new methodology:

When our Marxists explain the Hegelian principle in Marxist methodology they rightly claim that each thing can be examined as a microcosm, as a universal measure in which the whole big world is reflected. On this basis they say that to study one single thing, one subject, one phenomenon *until the end*, exhaustively, means to know the world in all its connections. (emphasis in original, p. 317)

Vygotsky contends that psychology requires explanatory principles that explain what meaning observed facts have in the context of psychology.¹⁹ Thus, while he disagrees with Pavlov's behaviourism, he commends his method: Pavlov studied the particular case of salivation in dogs, but this was grounded in an identification of what salivation has in common with other homogenous phenomena, and what dogs have in common with other animals. Thus, the degree to which salivation in dogs (the specific case) informed an understanding of the general biological principle of the reflex, was predetermined. To identify a microcosm (for Pavlov, salivation in dogs; for Marx, commodity value), then, is to understand what further analysis of the microcosm will reveal in relation to the macrocosm (Pavlov, the biological reflex; Marx, bourgeois society). This is why Vygotsky (1997) writes: "*to know the meaning is to know the singular as the universal*" (emphasis in original, p. 136).

This conceptualisation of microcosm owes much to Hegel (whether directly or through Lenin or Marx), who argues that microcosms are essentially concrete instantiations of the universal *macrocosm* of which it is a part, and reflect relationships and as-yet undifferentiated differences of that macrocosm (see, Lenin 1925/2003b; Stern 2009, Chap. 12). To simplify the relevant arguments from Hegel: if nature is considered a macrocosm—a dialectic that contains within it, not-yet-manifested differences (e.g. between organic and non-organic matter, animals, etc.)—then an animal can be considered a microcosm of nature. An animal is a specific instantiation of the essence of nature (its laws, matter, etc.), and because it is manifest in such a way, it also contains within its definition what it is *not* (e.g. an animal is not inorganic). Thus, reflected in the animal are the conditions of the macrocosm (e.g. laws of evolution, organisation of matter) that gave rise to the animal, as well as a relation to that which is external to it (Hegel 1970/2013, p. 108). Considered together, the individual animal is said to be a microcosm of the whole of nature.

¹⁹This point is also made while using the metaphors of reflection theory discussed earlier in this chapter: "When we know the *thing* and the *laws of reflection of light*, we can always explain, predict, elicit, and change the [mirror image]. And this is what persons with mirrors do. They study not mirror reflections but the movement of light beams, and explain the reflection" (Vygotsky 1997, p. 327).

Returning to Vygotsky, it can be plausibly argued that the word is indeed a microcosm of consciousness to the extent that its manifestation reflects the semantic nature of consciousness. However, it does not fully capture aspects of consciousness beyond the plane of thinking (e.g. motives, needs, desires, personality) that appear to be accounted for in *perezhivanie*. Rather, in being a concrete starting point for investigation, it can only indicate other aspects within the macrocosm to which the microcosm is related (in virtue of *not* being the microcosm), but which are not otherwise captured in the microcosm. The centrality of word-meaning therefore owes not only to it being a particular manifestation of the semantic nature of consciousness, but also to its potential to be studied “until the end”, to reveal its relation to other aspects (e.g. personality, affect) within the dialectic macrocosm of consciousness that can then form the basis of further investigations (with, e.g. *perezhivanie* as the new unit of analysis).

2.5.3 *Activity Theory*

In this final section, I turn briefly to the activity-theoretic interpretation—or, as I argue, *misinterpretation*—of Vygotsky’s *perezhivanie*, as exemplified in the influential work of A.N. Leontiev.²⁰ Activity Theory is built on the premise that Vygotsky’s theory of the cultural mediation of human mental development is incomplete. Like the concept of mediation, *perezhivanie* is subsequently interpreted within the broader context of activity (as opposed to consciousness), with Vygotsky’s conceptualisation found to be lacking and/or contradictory.

According to Leontiev (2005), Vygotsky argues that the effect an environment has on a child’s development is determined by the child’s “degree of comprehension of the environment and on the significance it has for him” (p. 17). This comprehension, in turn, rests on the development of word-meaning, conceptualised as “the specific form in which the development of the child’s consciousness takes place” (p. 18). Development consequently occurs through interaction between meanings—between the developing word-meanings that constitute consciousness, and the social meanings that are manifest in the ideal forms of development in the environment. Although Vygotsky specifically argues aspects of personality like motivation, needs and desires are beyond the plane of thought (where word-meaning, in one interpretation, is situated) and located in the deeper plane of consciousness, Leontiev interprets Vygotsky to be grounding the concept of *perezhivanie* in *thinking* (i.e. in the ability for generalisation, word-meaning) rather than consciousness. Consequently, the absence of personality in the concept of *perezhivanie* renders it a false (i.e. incomplete) unity of person and environment, and therefore, an inadequate unit for its analysis.

²⁰And also echoed in the work of Bozhovich (2009), discussed earlier.

This interpretation of Vygotsky, I argue, is uncharitable, relying on an understanding of word-meaning as a microcosm of consciousness *en toto*, as previously discussed. Leontiev's interpretation of Vygotsky also assumes that the following example fully captures the type of psychological processes—that is, only cognition—that determine *perezhivanie*:

The situation will influence the child in different ways depending on how well the child understands its sense and meaning. For instance, imagine a family member is dying. Obviously, a child who understands what death is will react to this differently than a child who does not understand at all what has happened (Vygotsky 1934, as cited by Leontiev 2005, pp. 16–17)

However, as previously discussed in this chapter, it is clear in Vygotsky's writing that, while cognitive processes like generalisation and understanding may play the decisive role in determining *perezhivanie*, it is not always the case. It is a matter of empirical discovery whether the decisive role is played by cognition, emotion, personality or any number of kinds or combinations of psychological processes. Even in the example of the three children from the same family, Vygotsky identifies different kinds of psychological processes as being salient in the determination of their *perezhivanie*: being overwhelmed, positive and negative attitudes and the ability to understand. Indeed, on a more charitable reading of this example, it is possible to find underlying aspects of personality, needs and desires, as contributing to the determination of *perezhivanie*. The eldest child's "precocious maturity [and] seriousness" (Vygotsky 1994, p. 340), for example, may contribute to his experiencing his situation as one which requires him to play the role of protector to his siblings—arguably, this *perezhivanie* is, at most, only *partly* determined by an intellectual understanding. In the same way that some theorists erroneously emphasised emotion as the sole determinant of *perezhivanie*, Leontiev has here emphasised cognition. Leontiev's alternative to Vygotsky's *perezhivanie* as a word-meaning-based intellectual process is to situate it in activity. Rather than being a primary fact of consciousness,²¹ *perezhivanie* is instead a secondary and derivative fact determined "by the content of the [practical, material] activity through which I realise [my] relationship [with the object]" (Leontiev 2005, p. 26). That is, *perezhivanie* is secondary, since it relies on word-meaning, which develops in childhood rather than existing from birth. For Leontiev, practical activity appears first, then later, thinking and *perezhivanie*.

Subsequent work in Activity Theory has attempted to return *perezhivanie* to the domain of consciousness. Clarà (2015), for example, has argued that *perezhivanie* is synonymous with *appraisal* in emotion theory, and is a representation in consciousness of an object's relation (un/desirable, harmful, valuable, dis/like) to the self as an individual with a particular history, aims and so on. Accordingly, the ability for an object/situation/event to affect the individual (i.e. the object's agency) is mediated through this "feeling" (i.e. emotion). The converse situation—one's

²¹The primacy of experience in consciousness is an interpretation also shared by Rubinstein (see, Fakhruddinova 2010).

effect on the environment—is instead mediated through cognition. Together, cognition and emotion are both implied in activity, since activity is constituted by both objects and subjects, and their respective agencies (Clarà 2015).

2.6 Concluding Remarks

The concept of perezhivanie does not stand alone: it exists within the rich conceptual system of cultural-historical theory and emerges as part of a new direction in Vygotsky's work. It is also necessarily informed by Vygotsky's theoretical and philosophical heritage, and alludes to (or crystallises) ideas scattered throughout his prolific career. Post-Vygotsky, the concept encounters issues of translation, interpretation and appropriation for differing domains of research. These issues are magnified through the particular research agendas of individual theorists seeking to develop, understand and use the concept. What emerges is thus a complex landscape of refinements, reinterpretations and differing operationalisations, each shedding light on different facets of the concept. This chapter begins the process of charting this varied landscape to illuminate the difficult terrain that lies ahead for researchers seeking to use the concept. It is by developing this foundation that perezhivanie's potential for particular research agendas can be explored (e.g. emotion; Part II, this volume), and its shortcomings addressed through new conceptual systems (e.g. subjectivity; Part III, this volume).

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