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*MEMORABLE DATES*  
*ПАМЯТНЫЕ ДАТЫ*

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## To The 75th Anniversary of Vitaly Rubtsov “Nothing Here Is Complete Without Me, and Nothing Has Had Time to Become One”

The anniversary of psychologist Vitaly Rubtsov is an occasion to reveal the originality of his way of thinking in his scientific and practical activity. This essay does not claim to be a full biographical sketch. The author only connects the intellectual biography of the celebrant with the logic of the history of science.

**Keywords:** V.V. Rubtsov, V.V. Davydov, Psychological Institute of RAE, MSUPE, thinking, picture of the world, physics, learning activity, collective and individual subject.

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Behold, I will do a new thing; Now it shall spring forth...  
I will even make a road in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.

*The Prophet Isaiah*

October 20th is the 75th anniversary of Vitaly Rubtsov. He is a founder, the first dean, the president of MSUPE, and the head of the International UNESCO Chair on “Cultural and Historical Psychology of Childhood” (MSUPE), an academician of RAO. Vitaly Rubtsov is a feat of Russian and Soviet psychology and education, a student and follower of the

“deeds and thoughts” of his teacher, Dr. Vasily Davydov. Rubtsov took over from him the baton of teaching in his scientific school at Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Dr. Davydov handed him over the governance of the Institute for the next 20 years, using term “deeds and thoughts” the way Davydov did. He is a rare case when the

list of academic ranks (far from being complete) reflects the scale of his personality and professional achievements. He got them due to his work. How did it happen that a graduate of the physics and energy department of the legendary Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, who could have made a brilliant career in physics, found himself at the “front door of Russian psychology” (as V.P. Zinchenko called the Psychological Institute on Mokhovaya Street)? It was destiny. But what is destiny? Unpredictable “determination by purpose”, as opposed to “determination by cause”. Strangely enough, precisely physics brought young Vitaly Rubtsov to psychology. There is no visible reason for a physicist to study psychology. But there can be quite a “visible” purpose. Vitaly Rubtsov, studying superconductivity, saw through the digital microscope the content of ideas [1]. We don’t invent such microscopes, they have already been created by thoughts capable of seeing the invisible and strengthening this vision with special tools. Before the Galilean “observer” there must have been a “thinker”! But where does the “thinker” come from? Spinoza suggests: if you want to understand the essence of a thing, construct it. Kant would later develop it in his own way into the “activity approach” (its first philosophical version).

This is how young physicist Vitaly Rubtsov faced the problem that stirred his science at the crossroads of the 19th and 20th centuries in disputes about quantum mechanics and general theory of relativity, which has not lost its acuteness until now. On the contrary if we look at the life of the modern human and his mixed reality with the constant mutual expansion of “digitals” in the “undigitized” and “undigitalizable”. Later, Rubtsov and his team will address this problem and will be the first to propose a scientific solution from the standpoint of activity theory. Rubtsov's team (Michael Cole and his group will do it in the USA) will show that it is not so much the digitalization of education that “challenges” the activity approach as the activity approach challenges digitalization, and that without incorporating IT into a full-fledged learning activity, the methods of which will themselves require digital tools for their construction, we should not expect any special breakthroughs. It will only give us the development of “programmed learning” on the basis of neo-behaviorist ideas of linear (B.F. Skinner) or branched programming (N.A. Crowder, S. Pressy).

But that’ll be in the 1980s. In the meantime, matter has not “disappeared”! We say “picture of the world”, or “scientific picture”. These are concepts, not metaphors. But if there is a “picture”, then there is an “artist”, an author, a creator. In Soviet times there was a curious case. In the early 1960s, the famous collection “Philosophical Encyclopedia” was being

prepared for publication, it was a bibliophile's dream to have one at home. And here one of the authors, if I am not mistaken, E.V. Ilyenkov wrote something like, “Atoms have not changed since the time of Democritus, but during this time several physical pictures of the world have changed”. The vigilant editor, who obviously learned dialectics not from Hegel, but from the textbook of Marxism-Leninism, was puzzled. How come? According to Engels, “the so-called objective dialectics reigns everywhere”, and dialectics is the doctrine of development. So he added, “Since the time of Democritus, atoms essentially have not changed...” The editor clearly didn’t know about the “epistemological revolution” that Immanuel Kant made, introducing into the picture of the world the concept of an epistemic agent — the author, the constructor of this picture. Kant was inspired by the Scottish thinker David Hume (by the way, Kant was a Scott from his mother’s side, but it does not explain the influence of Hume on him). But a century before Hume, Spinoza formulated this concept of knowing the essence of things in their creation, the activity of producing things, that’s when the very agent of creation was born. Hegel and Marx would build their philosophy upon this idea. In this philosophy, all human knowledge is reflexive; it is “knowledge about knowledge” and the knowledge about how it is being produced, extracted, generated, formed, and created. It’s knowledge about how it is transmitted through the centuries from generation to generation as a “creation”, it can appear only within a human community, and it reflects the historical regularities of life to the same extent as the laws of the structure of the world do.

Therefore, the immutable physical laws of reality can be understood only in the logic of the development of the theoretical thinking of physicists (and not only!) about these laws. It means already that school teaching of physics without the development of theoretical thinking on the examples of physical thought can hardly claim full scientificity. In the times of Einstein and Bohr, we forced schoolchildren to study physics from the position of Galileo's observer, stating the natural order of things, which we never encountered in life.

All this is very important in order to understand the initial motivation and scientific vector of psychologist Rubtsov. His first product was an experimental course on physics for grades 6 and 7. With these ideas, Rubtsov came to E.V. Ilyenkov (Rubtsov’s wife studied with his daughter). Ilyenkov addressed him to his closest friend, Vasily Davydov, who was a head of the laboratory of the young schoolkids at the Psychological Institute.

Rubtsov joined Davydov’s team at a very important moment. In the early 1970s, there was a

change — a reassessment of research priorities. From the study of theoretical generalization Davydov and his collaborators moved to the study of learning activity, its nature, structure, and development. Learning together, children develop communication forms that led them later to theoretical generalization. Davydov formulated it simply: a general (theoretical) way of action for solving a wide range of problems cannot be found unless it becomes common for a given school class, a group of students. Otherwise, its search will be meaningless. This is how L.S. Vygotsky's concept of the unity of generalization and communication was implemented in the activity content (this is the “junction” of the cultural-historical approach and the activity theory). Rubtsov was among the pioneers of studying this, together with G.A. Tsukerman, B.D. Elkonin, G.G. Kravtsov, and E.E. Shuleshk. But his research had a special direction, which would later be called socio-genetic psychology.

Figuratively speaking, thinking is when you, without realizing it, start speaking from the perspective of all intelligent people (in this case, physicists) who have ever lived on the globe, but with a questioning tone. And then you switch to the affirmative in your little solo part. And you can't hear the combined choir behind you. But a person with truncated thinking ability has a crowd screaming from his mouth, and it seems that he is too much. And to him, he is very big, and the bigger he feels, the louder the crowd in his mouth.

As V. Bibler would say (with him Davydov and Rubtsov were in a constant dialog-discussion), thinking is not so much a conversation with oneself as with others in oneself, they come from books, from life, from imagination. Sometimes quite unexpected interlocutors join the conversation, and you cannot simply “ask” them out of the discussion, even though you are the one who sets the rules. Sometimes old like-minded friends start saying unexpected, “strange” things. The creativity of theoretical thinking consists in comprehending these “surprises” and in trying to get to the source of these “strange things”.

The collective subject does not “self-liquidate” in the individual, but continues to live his own special “inner life”. Meanwhile, the transition from the collective form to the individual, the “interiorization”, has always been considered a key vector of development and had a big educational value. But where does the collective subject go? Does it only “reincarnate” in individual “exteriorizations” or does it stay as a “systemic quality” during the whole development process, the multiple variety of “interiorization-exteriorization” cycles?

The solution of Rubtsov and his followers are in favor of the second. No autonomization, individu-

alization of action, which acquires an independent, free, arbitrary character, is possible if the former form of collectivity is preserved. Individual development of thinking takes place within the developing thinking community. It is not only a student who is thinking, it is the study group, the class, the whole school! But they are thinking in the “developmental mode”. Rubtsov shows that at the level of a class (group) the development is ensured by the unity of the processes of communication, understanding, and reflexion, in which the “external” is constantly transforming into the “internal” and vice versa, when the understanding of things coincides with the mutual understanding of people, children and adults. This mutual understanding can happen only when there is a special way of cooperation in their actions, changing individual psychological positions during the activity. Social psychology cannot exist without genetic psychology, and genetic psychology without social psychology is distanced from the main thing — the source of development, reducing it to its “background”, “atmosphere”, a set of conditions of development. Rubtsov's solution, which is fully consistent with the key concept of L.S. Vygotsky, challenges not only the social psychology of education and development, but social psychology in general.

In the early 1990s, V.V. Rubtsov and A.A. Margolis got an idea to create in Moscow an International Educational and Psychological College (1993). They came to Dr. Davydov and he supported the idea. When they conceived this new form of education, they hardly suspected that the college would grow into world-known leading psychological Moscow State University of Psychology and Education. (MSUPE). In 1996, V.V. Rubtsov transformed the College into a University, it was still a Moscow city university. It would become a state university a decade later, MSUPE had become a known “brand” by that time. Rubtsov has very good organizational skills, in the shortest possible time the best Russian psychologist were invited to work in the new university. Teaching psychologists for science and practical work was combined with new research model on the basis of educational “development standards”.

Rubtsov always say: our University stands on the shoulders of a giant — the Psychological Institute, or rather, giants — scientists, whose labours not only made outstanding scientific breakthroughs in psychology, but also created unique schools, thanks to which these breakthroughs became collective. V.V. Rubtsov is an example of a rare happy coincidence of a scientist and an “organizer of science” in one person. Here is what Vitaly Vladimirovich himself says about it: “I tried to transfer the established culture of the organization of thinking, education, and activity here as a basis for the development and

construction of the system of preparing specialists at this university. Pay attention – the principle of scientific research, which is laid down in the Psychological Institute, here is the principle of education” [1, p. 118].

Both the Psychological Institute and the MSUPE are a living, multi-vocal collective subject of scientific thought and action, in the form of which a whole range of social practices are set today: educational, counselling, accompanying, therapeutic, etc.

The life motto of Rubtsov could be summarized in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke: “Nothing here is complete without me, and nothing has had time to become one”.

I would like to wish to the remarkable scientist Vitaly Rubtsov to have a good and long path under this motto. We have been friends for about 40 years and worked together in the scientific school of Vasily Davydov.

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*The Editorial Board of the “Cultural-historical psychology“ journal joins in the congratulations and wishes on this wonderful anniversary.*

### ***Literature***

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