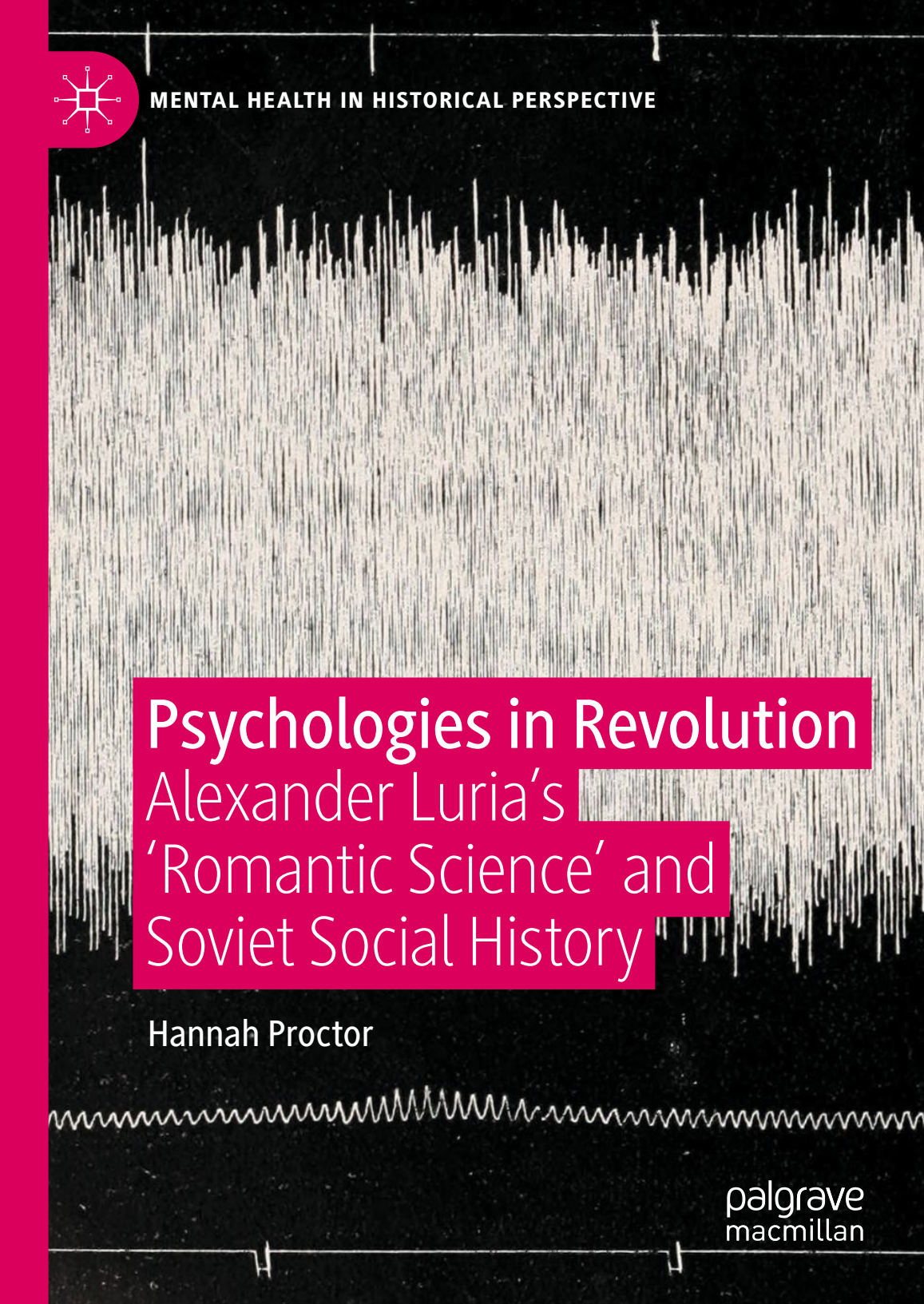
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Psychologies in Revolution
Alexander Luria's 'Romantic Science' and Soviet Social History
Hannah Proctor
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Note on Transliteration

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

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

'Let us assume a brain has been removed from its cranium and placed on a glass table before us.'[1] In a discussion of the localisation of brain function, Alexander Luria (1902–1977) invited his readers to imagine a brain removed from the body and displayed in isolation, its gelatinous surface visible from all angles. In such a situation, he explained, it would be possible to observe a fleshy grey mass of tissue ridged with 'deep furrows and raised convulsions'.[2] The 'uniform and monotonous' appearance of this lump of dead meat, however, belies the living brain's extraordinary complexity and dynamism.[3] Observing a brain in such a manner, Luria suggested, tells us very little about human experience. His solution was to reconnect brains with people and to situate those people in the world. As he commented in a lecture series delivered in 1976, towards the end of his life:

> 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.

[1] 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. First published in Russian as *Poteriannyi i vozrashchennyi mir: Istoriia odnogo raneniia* [*A World Lost and Re-gained: The Story of an Injury*] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGU, 1971).

[2] Luria, *Shattered*, p. 22.

[3] Luria, *Shattered*, p. 23.

H. Proctor, *Psychologies in Revolution*, Mental Health in Historical Perspective, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35028-4_1

> Above all, this means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence.[4]

Writing almost four decades earlier, he described his aims in strikingly similar terms:

> Modern psychology has come to the firm view that human personality is shaped by its concrete sociohistorical circumstances. We can think of no form of behaviour that can be studied in isolation from this historical context, by itself, independent of the specific sociohistorical conditions determining it.[5]

Luria consistently asserted that human consciousness could not be understood in isolation from history, culture or society.

Born in Kazan in 1902, Luria trained and began to work as a psychologist in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917. He moved to Moscow in 1923 where, aside from a brief spell in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in the early 1930s, he lived and worked for the rest of his life. He received a medical qualification in 1937 after which his research extended to encompass neurological investigations. Reading lists of institutions, disciplines 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-ences[6]—from psychoanalysis to criminology, neurosurgery to 'defectology', experimental medicine to pedagogy. Luria's bibliography,

[4] Luria, *Language and Cognition*, trans. by James V. Wertsch (Washington, DC: VH Winston and Sons, 1981), p. 25.

[5] Luria, 'A Child's Speech Responses and the Social Environment' in *Soviet Developmental Psychology*, ed. by Michael Cole (New York, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1977), pp. 32–64, p. 35, p. 60. Excerpted from the edited collection *Speech and Intellect among Rural, Urban and Homeless Children* [*Rech' i intellekt derevenskogo, gorodskogo i besprizornogo rebenka*] (Moscow: Gosizdat RSFSR, 1930), p. 32.

[6] The term 'psy-ences' was introduced by Elizabeth Lunbeck, Emily Martin and Louis Sass in the description of a seminar series and has since been applied to the Soviet and post-Soviet context in Eugene Raikhel and Dörte Bemme, 'Postsocialism, the psy-ences and mental health', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 53, 2 (2016), 151–175 and Tomas Matza, *Shock Therapy: Psychology, Precarity, and Well-Being in Postsocialist Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Raikhel and Bemme define the term as referring 'broadly to a set of arguments which link professional knowledge and expertise on the mind, brain, and behavior with the wide range of ways in which people conceive of, act upon, and govern themselves and others under conditions of modernity', p. 154.

which runs to approximately 350 publications in Russian alone, is similarly expansive.[7] 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 histories written in a literary style 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 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 long career. Indeed, he resisted drawing any clear distinctions between his work in 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.[8]

He coined the term 'neuropsychology' to describe the new 'synthetic' scientific discipline he sought to create.[9]

Luria dedicated time and energy to establishing conversations with psychologists, educators and neurologists in the West, ensuring that his work reached an international audience beyond the Eastern bloc. K.E. Levitin recalled that Luria's apartment had a 'huge custom-made mailbox' to

It is an extension of the term 'psy disciplines', which Nikolas Rose introduced to designate a range of scientific practices that since the nineteenth 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 the Soviet psy-ences in this publication, declaring that much about the subject 'remains to be analysed', p. 15.

[7] For a bibliography of Luria's publications see: Evgenia D. Homskaya, *Alexander Romanovich Luria: A Scientific Biography*, trans. by Daria Krotova (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 2001), pp. 127–161.

[8] Homskaya, pp. 1–2.

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

accommodate his voluminous correspondence.[10] Luria's position in 'world science' is assured; his publications still cited and revered.[11] His mid-career shift from psychoanalytic and psychological research into neurological investigations reflects broader developments in the psy-ences across the twentieth century, in dialogue with yet divergent from his contemporaries on the other side of the iron curtain. Aside from his autobiography and biographies (written mostly by former colleagues and a family member),[12] almost all of the existing literature on Luria is written by and for practicing psychologists, neurologists and educators.[13] Yet Luria himself emphasised the importance of situating theories in history noting 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.'[14] *Psychologies in Revolution* intends to apply this insight to Luria's own publications, contending that analysing Luria's research in isolation from the historical circumstances it emerged from and influenced would be like analysing someone's personality by examining their brain on a glass table.

[10] 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 former collaborator Michael Cole informed me that Luria set aside a few hours every day to keep up with his international correspondence (telephone interview, 23 September 2014). Similarly Oliver Sacks recalled that 'Luria, after a twelve or sixteen hour working day, would spend hours more with an enormous scientific correspondence, writing constantly to colleagues, former pupils, and friends, detailed, passionate letters, in half a dozen different languages'. Oliver Sacks, 'Luria and "Romantic Science"' in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology*, ed. by Anton Yasnitsky, René van der Veer and Michel Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 517–528.

[11] 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.

[12] T.V. Akhutina, 'A.R. Luriia: zhiznennyi put' [A.R. Luria: The Way of Life], *Kul'turno-istoricheskaya psikhologiia*, 2 (2012), 2–10, Evgenia D. Homskaya, *Alexander Romanovich Luria: A Scientific Biography*, trans. by Daria Krotova (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 2001), K.E. Levitin, *Mimoletnyi uzor* [*A Transient Pattern*] (Moscow: Izd-vo, 1978) (serialised in English translation in the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* in 1998) and E. Luria, *Moi Otets A.R. Luriia* [*My Father A.R. Luria*] (Moscow: Gnosis, 1994).

[13] See, for example, Anne-Lise Christensen, Elkhonon Goldberg and Dmitri Bougakov eds., *Luria's Legacy in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[14] 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. This book was written directly in English and subsequently translated into Russian.

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 his intention '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'.[15] The resulting text, *The Making of Mind*, written directly in English and published posthumously in 1979, forgoes a description of Luria's childhood experiences and begins instead in 1917 with the October Revolution (by which time he was already 15 years old):

> 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.[16]

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).[17] But as he noted in the autobiography's conclusion: 'People come and go, but the creative sources of great historical events and the important ideas and deeds remain.'[18]

Psychologies in Revolution eschews a detailed biographical approach to Luria as an individual, makes no attempt to describe his temperament or emotional sensibilities, says almost nothing about his family life and little about the many people with whom he collaborated professionally. Instead, it seeks to bring the 'social atmosphere' in which he conducted his research into sharper focus. Beginning in the aftermath of the October Revolution when Luria actively engaged in attempts to conceptualise what a properly

[15] Alexander Luria to Jerome Bruner, March 16, 1976, HUA, Jerome Bruner Papers, General Correspondence 1975–1977, HUG 4242.5, Box 88. Luria had written to Michael Cole shortly before writing to Bruner that the working title for his autobiography was: 'The Last Book'. Luria to Cole, March 2, 1976, Michael Cole Personal Archives.

[16] Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 17.

[17] For an analysis of his early career, see Michael Paul George Hames, 'The Early Theoretical Development of Alexander Luria', PhD, University of London, UCL, 2002. 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.

[18] Luria, *Making of Mind*, p. 188.

Marxist approach to human consciousness might entail, through the period of the First Five Year Plan (1928–1932) when he participated in projects seeking to gauge the cognitive impact of Stalinist policies, to the Second World War which saw him turn his attention to the rehabilitation of brain-injured soldiers, *Psychologies in Revolution* focuses on moments in Luria's career that coincided with particular moments in Soviet history, considering how both his research and the people it brought him into contact with were shaped by that history. Pushing Alexander Luria the man into the background also allows for the people he encountered in his research to come more clearly into view.[19] *Psychologies in Revolution* is less interested in the 'extraordinary person'[20] behind the name embossed on the spine of Luria's books than in the often marginalised Soviet people Luria and his collaborators sought to understand, describe, diagnose or treat.[21]

The Science of Social History

In February 1927, a basket appeared at a train station in Moscow addressed to the city of Briansk. Suspicious about its contents, workers at the station opened the basket to discover it contained a corpse. Dressed in a tunic, wrapped in paper and tied up with ropes, a woman's dead body was squashed into the basket. She had evidently been killed with a blunt instrument. The paper around her body was found to be a disposable tablecloth,

[19] Though the book does not discuss interpersonal relationships between the individuals with whom he worked in any detail, by de-emphasising Luria as an individual I hope implicitly to acknowledge the collaborative nature of his research, which saw him devising and conducting experiments collectively, even though his publications tended to be sole-authored. Treating Luria as a solitary genius also risks downplaying 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 Arievitch, 'Vygotskian Collaborative Project of Social Transformation: History, Politics, and Practice in Knowledge Construction', *The International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 12, 4 (2004), 58–80.

[20] Homskaya, p. 1.

[21] Though people Luria conducted experiments with may have ended up being classified as such and often belonged to demographics who routinely were, the term 'marginalised' here does not intend to imply official forms of disenfranchisement discussed by Golfo Alexopoulos, 'the millions who were deprived of their rights in the Stalin era and known as the *lishentsy*, a Russian word which literally means "the deprived" but is often translated as "the disenfranchised"'. Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 1.

which revealed where the murder had taken place: a restaurant called 'The Bear'. As this gruesome scene unfolded in Moscow, a man in Kyiv received a letter containing a baggage check coupon. The anonymous letter which accompanied it informed him that he could collect his wife in Briansk, a city approximately five hours by train from Moscow, explaining that she could not be sent all the way to Kyiv as the letter's sender did not have sufficient funds. The man in Kyiv was subsequently summoned to Moscow and identified his wife's body in the basket.[22] In the wake of this strange incident seven people were arrested; none of them were told of what crime they were suspected of committing. Before undergoing questioning by police the suspects were taken directly to a special laboratory where they were given a series of word association tests by a team of psychologists led by Luria, in an attempt to establish who had committed the murder. Although his work with criminals was short-lived, Luria's published work contains numerous examples of particular, peculiar and sometimes distressing glimpses into the lives and experiences of Soviet people from a range of social backgrounds—including industrial workers, rural school children, deaf babies, Uzbek *kolkhoz* members, orphaned teenagers and brain-injured Red Army soldiers—whose desires, thought processes, proclivities, memories and cognitive capacities he attempted to develop methods for understanding and treating.

Luria described psychology as the 'science of social history'.[23] As in the example of the account of the murdered body in the basket, however, Luria often contradicted his own theoretical pronouncements regarding the historical contingency of subjectivity by presenting short matter-of-fact vignettes relating to specific situations in isolation from the life trajectories and social backgrounds of the people involved. Although Luria recognised the primacy of history for understanding human subjectivity in theory, his work often failed to explore the specific impact of historical experiences on individuals in practice. As the first chapter of this book shows, in his experiments with suspected murderers, Luria was more interested in asking whether someone had committed a crime than in discovering the psychic motivations and consequences of doing so, but the

[22] Luria, *The Nature of Human Conflicts or Emotion, Conflict and Will: An Objective Study of Disorganisation and Control of Human Behaviour*, trans. by W. Horsley Gantt (New York, NY: Liveright, 1932), p. 109.

[23] 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. 6.

thumbnail cases included in that series nonetheless provide glimpses of the Soviet quotidian in Moscow during the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1921–1928) that gesture towards the broader social environment in which the actions being described unfolded. *Psychologies in Revolution* intends to situate Luria's publications in the tumultuous historical circumstances out of which they arose, asking what can be gleaned about the interplay between one particular Soviet theory of subjectivity and the subjectivities of Soviet people through an analysis of the mediated and often abbreviated portraits that appear in key publications based on Luria's extensive clinical work.

Luria's research was premised on normative assumptions about individual human development. He argued that the 'advanced' human subject 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 'civilisation' and the maturation of the ('healthy') individual from baby to adult. 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 'civilised' or 'cultured' [*kul'turnye*], educated and healthy adult. Luria, however, had little to say directly about this 'advanced' figure. He could only discern its outline, as though it stood on a high mountain silhouetted in front of the glaring sun. Instead, he looked at the base in order to explain the route to the peaks. The ideal person to whom much of Luria's work was tacitly addressed was conceptualised in opposition to a cluster of figures assumed to depart from that ideal. Informed by the logic of Luria's research, each chapter of *Psychologies in Revolution* is structured around one such figure, with a particular emphasis on those whose supposed cognitive 'backwardness' was connected to their social position: the criminal, the 'primitive' (Uzbek peasants with no formal education), the child, the aphasic (brain-injured Red Army soldiers) and the synaesthete.

Psychologies in Revolution builds on an existing body of work focusing on the theories and legacies of Luria's collaborator Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934),[24] but as Luria's friend Bruner noted in a letter to the British

[24] On Vygotsky, see, for example, Alexei Kozulin, *Vygotsky: A Biography of Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). And more recently: René van der Veer and Anton Yasnitsky eds., *Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016) and Anton Yasnitsky, *Vygotsky: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 2016). For an example of the meticulous philological approach common in analyses of Vygotsky's

educator and translator Joan Simon in 1995: 'In all this Vygotskimania Luria is almost forgotten.'[25] Luria met Vygotsky in 1924, an event which he narrated as a decisive turning point in his intellectual development and they shared ideas and devised projects together for the next decade (until the latter's death from tuberculosis at the age of 37). In a letter to Oliver Sacks in 1973, he declared: 'I am only a pupil of Lev Vygotsky—the real genius of Soviet science. … His starting point was that complex psychological processes have not an inner (biological) origin, don't start in the depths of the brain, but are the result of a social origin.'[26] Luria consistently expressed his indebtedness to Vygotsky's theorisations of the relationship between people and their environments,[27] and he was responsible for ensuring Vygotsky's works reached a wide international audience, but he outlived his former mentor by over 40 years and hence produced a much larger and more diverse oeuvre. Furthermore, unlike in many of Vygotsky's most celebrated writings, in which eloquent discussions of Marx and Engels, Spinoza and Hegel, and Shakespeare and Mayakovsky are brought to bear on psychological debates, Luria's publications rarely strayed as far from his empirical investigations and experiments.[28] Analyses of Vygotsky's work sometimes remain within the realms of intellectual history or philosophy,[29] whereas *Psychologies in Revolution* is less

work, see E. Zavershneva, 'Issledovanie rukopisi L.S. Vygotskogo "Istoricheskii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa"' [An investigation of the manuscript of L.S. Vygotsky's 'Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology'], *Voprosy psikhologii*, 6 (2009), 119–137.

[25] Letter from Jerome Bruner to Joan Simon, 26 January 1995. London, Institute of Education (IOE), Brian Simon Papers, DC/SIM/2/10. Only three of the 21 essays in a recent collection on 'cultural-historical psychology' are explicitly concerned with Luria's work and only one of those three considers Luria in isolation from Vygotsky. See Anton Yasnitsky, René van der Veer and Michel Ferrari eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-historical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[26] Luria to Sacks, July 19, 1973, Oliver Sacks Archives, Oliver Sacks Foundation, New York City (transliteration modified for consistency).

[27] See, for example, the dedication to Vygotsky in A.R. Luria, *Higher Cortical Functions in Man*, trans. by Basil Haigh (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966).

[28] 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 Wollock, trans. by René van der Veer (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1997), pp. 233–343.

[29] See, for example, Carl Ratner and Daniele Nunes Henrique Silva eds., *Vygotsky and Marx: Towards a Marxist Psychology* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017) or Maria Chehonadskih, 'Soviet Epistemologies and the Materialist Ontology of Poor Life: Andrei Platonov, Alexander Bogdanov and Lev Vygotsky', PhD, Kingston University, 2017.

interested in Luria's many theoretical pronouncements about the primacy of history for understanding psychology than it is in analysing how Luria's publications also *document* social history, providing oblique insights into the experiences and outlooks of an array of Soviet people across six decades, through accounts of his clinical encounters.

In *Russian Psychology* (1989), David Joravsky 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.[30] He suggests Luria cynically switched approaches again and again to avoid persecution and that his works demonstrate no meaningful engagement with Marxism. Luria reacted furiously to a review by Joravsky published in 1974 in the *New York Review of Books* that made similar arguments, proclaiming dramatically that 'it evoked a deep disappointment, perhaps even a feeling of a certain disgust' for overlooking his consistent interest in demonstrating 'that the higher psychological processes are of a social-historical origin'.[31] Despite Luria's vehement protestations *Psychologies in Revolution* intends to take seriously Joravsky's accusation that Luria's '"social-historical" approach remains a declared goal, but he does not go beyond general declarations'.[32] Rather than framing this as a question of political conviction, however, this book instead seeks to unpick what Luria meant when he talked about history and to ask what that definition included and occluded.

Somewhat confusingly Luria's research was animated by two distinct and indeed contradictory understandings of history: on the one hand, he treated individual human development as a recapitulation of civilisational development (the ontogenetic maturation from childhood to adulthood was treated as a counterpart to a phylogenetic progression from primitivism to civilisation), while on the other hand he emphasised the contingent impact of specific cultural and political experiences on individuals. The former understanding is meta-historical and imagines individual

[30] David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 246–248.

[31] More amusingly he also objected to being hailed as a 'great' Soviet psychologist stating bluntly: 'My work is of average value, and no more'. Luria to Sacks, September 1, 1974, Oliver Sacks Archives, Oliver Sacks Foundation, New York City.

[32] David Joravsky, 'A Great Soviet Psychologist', *New York Review of Books*, May 16, 1974, pp. 22–25, p. 23.

development as an extrinsic miniature model which replicates historical progress on an individual scale, whereas the latter defines history as the ever-shifting environment enveloping individuals in the present. In practice, however, the progressive developmental framework that informed Luria's understanding of individual development did not always map neatly onto his understanding of history as an individual's immediate social environment, life experience and inherited culture. The abstract linearity of the former could not fully account for the messy concrete realities of the latter. *Psychologies in Revolution* discerns tensions between these two forms of history on the pages of Luria's publications, emphasising instances in which the utterances and experiences they document (however partially) challenged or complicated Luria's normative assumptions about ideal forms of cognition. By questioning Luria's insistence that human subjects should ideally develop *like* history (and that history should ideally develop teleologically through a series of stages punctuated by dialectical transformations), *Psychologies in Revolution* intends to bring the experiences of people who lived *in* history to the fore.[33]

Mapping Soviet Psychic Territories

Questions of agency and conceptualisations of self-hood are central to historiographical accounts of Soviet history, which often rely, however implicitly, on assumptions about human psychology.[34] In accounts of the

[33] Following the insights of Michel Foucault's 'Lives of Infamous Men', I have sought in Luria's scientific publications glimmers of 'lives whose disarray and relentless energy one senses beneath the stone-smooth words'. Foucault intended to assemble a collection of moments when obscure people suddenly seemed to leap out from dry archival documents whose historical function was to control them; he hoped to register moments of textual dissonance where official language was disturbed, ruffled or interrupted by 'wild intensities' that provided a peek into the ordinarily unrecorded 'quotidian elements of existence'. Michel Foucault, 'Lives of Infamous Men' in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. III, ed. by James D. Faubian, trans. by Robert Hurley et al. (New York, NY: New Press, 2001), pp. 157–175, p. 158, p. 170, p. 175. I discuss this essay in more detail in Hannah Proctor, 'History from Within: Identity and Interiority', *Historical Materialism*, 26, 2 (2018), 75–95.

[34] See Svetlana Boym and Marina Mogilner, 'Kak Sdelana "Sovetskaia Sub'etivnost"?' [How is "Soviet Subjectivity" Made?], *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2002), 285–296 and Anna Krylova, 'The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies', *Kritika*, 1, 1 (2000), 119–146. On the tendency of historians to rely on assumptions about psychology without acknowledging the provenance or underpinning of those assumptions, which have histories of their own, see Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Soviet psy-ences discussions of historically situated theories of subjectivity can thus sometimes become confusingly entangled with the author's own (sometimes disavowed) assumptions about human behaviour. Boris Groys has gone so far as to bombastically declare psychology as a discipline fundamentally incompatible with the Soviet system:

> 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.[35]

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', he writes, 'private psychology was subordinated to official ideology and therefore was also nationalised'.[36] In his polemic *Homo Sovieticus* (2017) Wladimir Velminski, despite unearthing some fascinatingly eccentric and esoteric strains of Soviet scientific practice, similarly claims that Soviet individuals were effectively hypnotised by the state to produce and reproduce total ideological conformity.[37] In both cases the complex histories of Soviet psy-ences are subordinated to a sweeping characterisation of the supposedly homogenous psychologies of Soviet people. *Psychologies in Revolution* traces one particular strand of the history of the Soviet psy-ences that challenges these reductive portrayals. Psy-ences in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were indeed subordinated to official ideology (although that by no means resulted in a single monolithic approach and the demands and discourses of the state shifted substantially between 1917 and 1991), but the pages of Luria's books attest to continued incongruities between the psychic territories he attempted to navigate and the maps he employed; incongruities that ultimately, I argue, led him to develop a new mode of scientific writing that

[35] Boris Groys, 'Privatizations/Psychologizations' in *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 57–68, p. 58.

[36] Groys, 'Privatizations', p. 59.

[37] Wladimir Velminski, *Homo Sovieticus: Brain Waves, Mind Control, and Telepathic Destiny* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017). I discuss this book in more detail in Hannah Proctor, 'Book Review: Homo Sovieticus', *History of the Human Sciences*, September 5, 2017, https://www.histhum.com/413/.

found a different way of describing the diverse psychic terrains he encountered.

Psychologies in Revolution contends that in contrast to the short cases and reports on experimental protocols that characterised many of Luria's works—found in the presentation of his research with criminals conducted in the 1920s through to his later publications such as *Human Brain and Psychological Processes*—he ultimately developed a mode of writing capable of attending to psychic experiences in all their variety, specificity and complexity: the 'romantic' case history. In a review article published in 1973 which prompted Luria to make contact with his American colleague for the first time, Oliver Sacks characterised Luria as a 'divided man' whose work was split between texts 'marked by a certain impersonality and coldness of style which match the "objectivity" of approach they embody' and those which convey 'the infinite complexity of human nature and human beings … the texture of human thought, perception and action, the ways this can be damaged or disordered, and the ways it can be reconstituted'.[38] In his response Luria rebutted this characterisation insisting that 'only the style of these two books [his two 'romantic' case histories *The Mind of a Mnemonist* and *The Man with a Shattered World*] is different from others, but the principle remains the same'.[39] This may have been an accurate description of his clinical practice, but *Psychologies in Revolution* contends that the sharp difference in written style Sacks observed did mark a decisive shift in the mode in which Luria presented the people with whom he worked as a clinician and thus, at least from a reader's perspective, also marked a shift in principle.

Cracked Monoliths

In the obituary that appeared in *The New York Times* 60 years after the revolution, Luria was described as: 'A Communist Party member who remained aloof from Marxist-Leninist ideology'.[40] This statement implies that Luria maintained a contradictory relationship to the Soviet establishment: paying lip service to the regime, while remaining intellectually

[38] Oliver Sacks, 'The Mind of AR Luria', *The Listener*, June 28, 1973, pp. 870–873, p. 871.

[39] Luria to Sacks, July 19, 1973, Oliver Sacks Archives, Oliver Sacks Foundation, New York City.

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

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, dangerously ideological or bogus, while downplaying the social, political and cultural factors that influenced the work of scientists, like Luria, whose work achieved international acclaim.[41] In obituaries that appeared in *The Times*, Luria was similarly defined in opposition to a stereotyped image of the Soviet psychologist as a coldly mechanistic 'rigid Pavlovian'. Instead he was hailed for his concern for 'the acting and suffering individual'; his work was said to exhibit an 'ultimate concern with the human condition', at odds with mainstream Soviet practices.[42] Although Ivan Pavlov was the most influential Soviet psy-entist,[43] whose work on conditioned reflexes was deemed compatible with dialectical materialism and provided the dominant paradigms within the Soviet psy-ences, and Luria was not a Pavlovian (something, as we shall see, he was forced to publicly repent for in the 1950s),[44] Luria's research was not therefore conducted outside of Soviet history. As Joseph Wortis noted in his 1950 overview of the heated debates and heterogeneous methods that characterised Soviet psychology in the wake of the October Revolution:

> 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

[41] Loren R. Graham, *What Have We Learned About Science and Technology from the Russian Experience?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 5–8.

[42] See 'Professor A. R. Luria', *The Times*, September 5, 1977, p. 14. See also, Oliver Zangwill, 'Professor A. R. Luria', *The Times*, September 9, 1977, p. 16.

[43] See Daniel P. Todes, *Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Benjamin Zajicek, 'Scientific Psychiatry in Stalin's Soviet Union: The Politics of Modern Medicine and the Struggle to Define 'Pavlovian' Psychiatry, 1939–1953', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2009.

[44] In his first letter to Oliver Sacks Luria took issue with Sacks' claim in a review article on Luria that he studied with Pavlov: 'I never was a pupil of Pavlov, and never studied under him, as a matter of fact I met Pavlov twice in my life—both times for a very short time—no more than half an hour.' Luria to Sacks, July 19, 1973, Oliver Sacks Archives, Oliver Sacks Foundation, New York City. On a trip to the USSR in 1958 (not long after the 'Pavlovian Sessions') the American psychiatrist Henry Murray recalled Luria being scathing about Pavlov's work, saying: 'Pavlov's concepts are not adequate to account for the neurodynamics of man though they are all right for animals.' Henry A. Murray Papers, Harvard University Archives, Miscellaneous Personal Papers and Biographical Notes, 1902–1988, Box 5, Memories of Places visited, USSR, 1958, p. 3.

> 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.[45]

Luria's obituary writer was not incorrect to identify a warmth and concern for others in Luria's writings, but those qualities arose within not in spite of their Soviet context. In his analysis of the late Soviet period, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2006), anthropologist Alexei Yurchak challenges accounts of the Soviet experience that carve out a false binary between public utterance and private belief of the sort evident in the obituaries of Luria that appeared in the English-language press. Instead, Yurchak insists that late Soviet life was characterised by paradox: fear, coercion and cynicism coexisted with a commitment to community, creativity and concern for the future.[46] Christina Kiaer argues in relation to the history of art that Soviet culture and society were consistently 'more dynamic and varied than is usually supposed',[47] a statement that could also extend to Soviet science and to Soviet people.

The October Revolution had an impact on individual psychological experience and influenced research agendas in the psy-ences. Luria's work was explicitly addressed to the problem of the mutually transformative relationship between human consciousness and society. He contributed to debates about human development that raged in the

[45] Joseph Wortis, *Soviet Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, 1950), pp. x–xi. See also: Artur V. Petrovsky, *Psychology in the Soviet Union: A Historical Outline*, trans. by Lilia Nakhapetyan (Moscow: Progress, 1990), p. 362. This characterisation is also borne out by more recent scholarship, see, for example: Eugene Raikhel and Dörte Bemme, 'Postsocialism, the psy-ences and mental health', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 53, 2 (2016), 151–175 and Sarah Marks and Mat Savelli eds., *Psychiatry in Communist Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[46] See, Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). Jochen Hellbeck similarly challenges such hermeneutic approaches by stating that 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, for part of this trend in scholarship on Soviet subjectivity, see Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[47] Christina Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s', *Oxford Art Journal*, 28, 3 (2005), 323–334, p. 323.

aftermath of the October Revolution.[48] 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.[49] Maria Gough's *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (2005) quotes this passage in its opening paragraph. For Gough, whose work is focused on avant-garde art practices, experimentation in the early Soviet period was 'not a process sequestered in a laboratory, but rather pervades every aspect of everyday life'.[50] Constructivist artists working in post-revolutionary Russia did not intend to confine themselves to galleries, but they 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.'[51] Histories of Soviet psychology tend to remain sequestered within laboratories, but Soviet psychologists and psychiatrists were swept up in the revolutionary tumult with everything and everyone else. Indeed, Luria's work was not always confined to laboratories—the studies that form the basis of this book's chapters saw him and his teams conducting research in universities, police cells, rural schools, streets, collective farms, Uzbek tea houses and field hospitals.

Luria's research was bound up with what T.J. Clark has described as the 'buzz of voices, all rattled and contradictory' unleashed by the October

[48] For overviews of Soviet psychology stretching back to the Cold War era, 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* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), Matza, *Shock Therapy*, pp. 37–65, John Mcleish, *Soviet Psychology: History, Theory, Content* (London: Methuen, 1975), A.V. Petrovskii, *Psikhologiia v rossii: XX Vek* [*Psychology in Russia: Twentieth Century*] (Moscow: Izd-vo URAO, 2000) and Joseph Wortis, *Soviet Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, 1950).

[49] Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow', *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 22–46, p. 28.

[50] Maria Gough's, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 1.

[51] 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 *Lef*, 1 (1923), 12–39.

Revolution, but he also continued to participate in Soviet society long after the 'state started shouting through the revolution's mouth'.[52] His 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 be was still unsettled and multiple competing theories emerged, but his work continued into the Stalinist period when the parameters of Soviet scientific discourse began to narrow. Although the state sought to contain the contradictory voices buzzing in the wake of the revolution, 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 state had multiple mouths to shout through which could never achieve a fully harmonious or synchronised noise but retained a cacophonous aspect, however, muffled. Indeed, even when Luria himself attempted to produce work within the approved parameters of state-sanctioned discourse, he consistently conducted research with people who failed to do so due to their social experiences or psychological conditions: the Uzbek peasant unfamiliar with the term 'Trade Union', the street child incapable of defining 'The Soviet Union' or the brain-injured Red Army soldier who could no longer recognise Lenin's face. Such people had little in common with Luria's ideal 'advanced' human subject, nor were they the kinds of figures likely to be found striding across Bolshevik propaganda posters or carved in stone atop the pedestals of city squares, but they were Soviet people nonetheless.

It would be possible to cast Luria himself 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. *Psychologies in Revolution* is less interested in Luria's personal motivations than in the texts he produced and the broader historical environment from which they arose, but the contradictions evident in Luria's professional trajectory are worth sketching for what they reveal about the complexities and changing circumstances that influenced how scientific research in the Soviet Union was conducted more broadly. They also point to the limitations of the kinds of reductive and monolithic characterisations of the Soviet experience elaborated by Groys and Welminski.

[52] T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in the History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 297.

In *Stalinist Science* (1997), Nikolai Krementsov discusses the relationship between Soviet scientists and the state, declaring that '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'.[53] Yet as was the case with the artists who continued producing work under Stalinism discussed by Kiaer, Luria and his collaborators were 'creators as well as victims'.[54] As we shall see, Luria was not immune from ideological campaigns and he faced public criticism at various points during the Stalin era: he recanted his early interest in psychoanalysis, faced denunciation for being overly reliant on Western 'bourgeois' theories and insufficiently interventionist in the 1930s and lost his position at the Medico-Genetic Institute in 1936. In 1952 he was called upon to publicly repent as part of the notorious 'Pavlovian Session' at the Academy of Agricultural Sciences when all Soviet psychologists were forced to demonstrate their allegiance to Ivan Pavlov's theorisations of conditioned reflexes.[55] He also narrowly avoided persecution in the antisemitic Doctor's Plot in the early 1950s.[56]

[53] Nikolai Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 258. The infamous case of the Soviet geneticist Trofim Lysenko historically functioned as the paradigmatic example of the detrimental impact of an explicitly ideological approach to nature (see Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science?: The Case of Lysenko* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977) and Ethan Pollock, 'From *Partiinost*' to *Nauchnost*' and Not Quite Back Again: Revisiting the Lessons of the Lysenko Affair', *Slavic Review*, 68, 1 (2009), 95–115). Discussions of the pathologisation and imprisonment of dissidents in psychiatric institutions that emerged in the 1960s dominated Western representations of Soviet psychological practices in the Cold War era (see, e.g., Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Political Hospitals: The Abuse of Psychiatry in the Soviet Union* [London: Victor Gollancz, 1977]). This scandal tended to cast the USSR as a uniquely punitive and oppressive state rather than considering parallels with contemporaneous psychiatric practices in the West or considering psychological developments in the Soviet context that did not participate in those repressive programmes. The literature on the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union is very large, see, for example: A.S. Prokopenko, *Bezumnaia psikhiatriia: Sekretnye materialy o primenenii v SSSR psikhiatrii v karatel'nykh tseliakh* (Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno, 1997), Rebecca Reich, *State of Madness: Psychiatry, Literature and Dissent After Stalin* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018) and Theresa C. Smith and Thomas A. Oleszczuk, *No Asylum: State Psychiatric Repression in the Former USSR* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996).

[54] Kiaer, p. 324.

[55] Levitin, p. 40.

[56] 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. Levitin claims that during the Doctor's Plot Luria kept a suitcase packed in case he was arrested and