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Conscious- Affectivity: Spinoza and Vygotsky

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Abstract

This article seeks to compare Spinoza’s philosophy with Vygotsky’s psychology on the problem of consciousness: How should one define this *entity* of internal reflexivity, if one’s analytical point of departure is not personal and substantial thought, but social and interpersonal relation, constitutive of individual thought? One of the clearest definitions of consciousness Vygotsky gives is the following: “consciousness is the experience of experiences (*soznanie est’ perezhivanie perezhivanii*).” This conception of consciousness is very close to that of Spinoza who, defining it as “the idea of the idea,” explains the extent to which consciousness and affectivity are linked. We will therefore show in what sense consciousness, understood as Affect, is constituted by the social environment, and why we can identify degrees of consciousness or awareness in children, depending on whether the lived affect is more or less developed, that is, more or less active. And we will relate the power of reflexivity of consciousness to the power of reversibility of corporeal affections, starting with that of words.

Keywords

Spinoza, Vygotsky, consciousness, experience [*perezhivanie*], Affect

Impersonal thought

With Spinoza and, by extension, with the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, we would here like to develop a schema of thought that is critical of the *cogito*. But first it is necessary to distinguish between the philosophical and narrative experience of the *cogito*, such as it is presented at least in the first two *Meditations* (after having been first introduced in the *Discourse on Method*) on the one hand, and the no doubt philosophical but above all standardized formulation of the *cogito*, such as it appeared in the history of thought from the nineteenth century onward, on the other hand. The philosophical and narrative experience of the *cogito* is that of the acquisition of absolute certitude (“I am, I exist” in the actual act of thinking in the first person: *cogito*),¹ on the basis of a doubt deliberately employed to the extreme, hyperbolized; in this sense the *cogito*, or rather the experience of the *cogito*, is the experience of he who undoubtedly knows himself to exist insofar as he thinks (or as long as he thinks). By contrast, the standardized formulation of the *cogito* is taken as a result, even a slogan, according to which there is a fundamental principle of being and thinking, that of “I think,” that of a personal substance of one’s own thought: it is no longer a matter of an unfolding experience (*une expérience en train de se faire*), of an experience of thought in the sense of an experience of one’s own thinking being—the experience of *cogito*; but of an established fact, a fixed noun, *the cogito*.

In short, one must make a clear distinction between *cogito* as “experience,” or even as “performance,” in any case as an effort to renew for itself an irrefutable truth, and the *cogito* as “signifier,” not as active production of truth, but as produced truth, as established certainty. The first form of the *cogito* is obviously that of the Cartesian text, which at the same time can become the experience of everyone, so long as we reiterate it on our own behalf; the second form of the *cogito*, even if one might regret the fixed or rigid nature of its formulation, has become the foundation of a subjective, if not subjectivist, philosophy within the history of thought, asserting that the first truth for man is his act of thinking in the first person, which is therefore the act of a substantial subject bearing its own thought: in short, the act of being self-conscious.² And this *cogito*, dis-

¹ “Ego sum, ego existo; certum est. Quandiu autem? Nempe quandiu cogito” (Descartes 1983: 27).

² As Etienne Balibar reminds us: “*Conscientia* does not appear in the *Meditations*, which would later be considered the foundation of the theory of the subject conscious of itself, notably in the analyses of the ‘thing that thinks’ in the Second and Third *Meditations*, any more than it does in the *Discourse on Method* or *The Passions of the Soul*. Without Descartes there would not have been any invention of *conscience* in French (and before it ‘consciousness’ in English), not because he invented it, but

torted into a banner or a rallying cry, has likewise become a foil, a figure to criticize, to deconstruct or to reject.

Thus, to speak as we have done so far, with Spinoza and Vygotsky, of a critical schema of the *cogito* is just as reductive as transforming experience of the *cogito* into a slogan, that of a subjectivist philosophy. And yet, if one had to demarcate positions, define camps, provoke confrontations—and it seems to us that this war metaphor is to a certain extent an appropriate one for the history of ideas—we maintain this idea: With Spinozism, the first truth is no longer that of a subject that thinks in the first person, but that of an impersonal thought that produces the thinking subject. Primacy is no longer attributed to the substance of the mind, of which thought is the essential attribute, but to substantial thought, of which the mind is a modality that can no longer exactly be called a “subject.”

And this impersonal thought, that does not primarily express itself in the first person, but as a particular form of being constitutive of absolutely infinite being (as an infinite attribute amongst the infinity of infinite attributes constitutive of divine substance), *crosses men*—an assertion that is formulated in the form of an axiom in the second part of the *Ethics*: the fact that “I think” (*cogito*) is no longer advanced, but that “man thinks” (*homo cogitat*). Jan Hendriksz Glazemaker, who first translated the *Ethics* into Dutch, and who comes from a Cartesian background, adds: “or, to put it differently, we know that we think (*of anders, wy weten dat wy denken*)” (Spinoza 1996: 32). This additional phrase (“we know that we think”) can be interpreted in a negative sense, as Paolo Cristofolini has done, for whom “here the Cartesian *cogito* treacherously and deceptively creeps in, and the reader must understand the difference or reject the additional phrase” (2012: 18). This confirms what we noted earlier: for some, the figure of the *cogito* is truly a figure of evil. For our part we will interpret this additional phrase in the Dutch edition of *Nagelate Schriften* differently.

In the first instance, it allows us to make the fact of the experience of one’s own thought commonplace (*banaliser*): every man knows that he thinks, it is a common or everyday experience — “an anonymous fact of everyday experience,” as Martial Gueroult says when commenting on this axiom (1974: 32).

In Spinozist terms, one might even say that such a fact is a common notion, that is, the adequate idea of a common property of all so-called human minds. This is not an exclusively human property, however: that man thinks does not mean that only he thinks. Spinoza explicitly states this in an aside at the beginning of the scholium to Proposition 57 of Part

because it emerged as a response to difficult problems posed by the interpretation of his doctrine” (Balibar 2013: 13).

III of the *Ethics*: “From this it follows that the affects of animals which are called irrational (for after we know the origin of the mind, we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things)” (Spinoza 1996: 101–02). Spinoza challenges the conventional wisdom that animals are not rational. This does not mean that he actually approves this, since nothing in principle rules out that animals can form adequate ideas. But it does mean that they have the ideas of the affections of their bodies, that is to say that they perceive the objects around them in perceiving their body—this Spinoza affirms explicitly—and this perception is an experience of thinking. Animals are individuals, as the scholium to Proposition 13 of Part II of the *Ethics* states, driven to a certain degree by, in the sense that they are endowed to a certain degree with, a mind that is the idea of their body. The analysis of the origin of the mind, the subject of Part II of the *Ethics*, begins with the fact that “man thinks”; it could end, or rather culminate, with another fact: namely that “an animal feels,” that is to say that in its own way “an animal thinks” (*brutum sentit, sive animal cogitat*).

In the second instance, the additional phrase included in the Dutch translation, if it constitutes a rapprochement with the Cartesian *cogito*, above all enables us to highlight a difference: it is no longer an “I” that thinks in the first person, but a “we.” And the fact that it is a “we” is important from an ethico-political point of view: this “we” is in fact the condition for the thought of the “I,” what determines the mind to think, and to think either very little, badly, that is, to think passively, or to think better, more, that is, to think actively. The “we” is the name of the power of the common, which explains that in fact one never thinks alone, which does not exclude the possibility of being determined, by others, to think by oneself.

How would we respond to those who might nonetheless ask, possibly in a Cartesian gesture: But how does Spinoza know that “man thinks,” why is this self-evident, axiomatic for him? How would we respond to those who might say, moreover, that what we call “men,” in any given group, are unthinking beings, machines dressed up in hats and coats, for example, or in any case “automata, utterly devoid of intelligence” (Spinoza 1955: 17), to evoke a Spinozist expression? We could say that Spinoza does not in fact pose the question of knowing how we know that man thinks: no doubt this is because, for him, it is not a problem, which itself can indeed be seen as a fine tribute to Descartes. That each man thinks, and knows that he thinks, and knows himself to exist as a thinking reality is self-evident (brought to light by Descartes). In short, there is no need to return to this point; it has already been proven. The axiom “man thinks” will therefore also mean that “man” will be called a thinking being (as this goes without saying), and that if, in the order of our encounters, we were dealing—whether we recognize it as such or not—with a machine without thought (assuming that that would be possible for Spinoza), then it would not be a man—which in no way invalidates the fact that if it is a man, it

thinks. For Spinoza, then, the problem is not of knowing how we know that man thinks, but of knowing how man can think more, and better, how he can go from inadequate to adequate thought. That man thinks is a given; that man might think more or better is a genuine problem, the ethico-political problem.

Consciousness as a problem

If the assertion that “man thinks” does not pose a problem for Spinoza, the question of the origin and the nature of *consciousness*, particularly human consciousness, nonetheless remains tricky for him: Spinoza devotes four propositions at the heart of Part II of the *Ethics* to this question, four propositions concerning the knowledge or the idea that the mind has of itself—the idea of the idea, in short.⁵

Why is the question of *consciousness* problematic for Spinoza? Generally speaking, one might say that the Spinozist reversal of the Cartesian *cogito*—the ontological and gnoseological foundation is no longer the substantial human mind that thinks in the first person, but substantial thought as a divine attribute of which the human mind is only a particular production, a precisely determined modality—does not mean a rejection of interiority, a reduction or lessening of consciousness, an expulsion of thinking in the first person (even if things have sometimes been presented in this way). Of course, from a Spinozist perspective, mental interiority is determined by exteriority, by the otherness of certain ideas (in this sense, the border between interiority and exteriority is weakened, blurred, or made porous at the very least). Of course, subjective individuality is thought of more as a product than a foundation, since the “I think” is not the element from which a “we think” is constituted, but is also and above all constituted by it (“I think” because “we think”: *cogitamus ergo cogito*). But there is nonetheless still an irreducibility of interiority, and for Spinoza it is a matter of understanding it, as with all things, as a fact of nature. What is at stake for Spinoza, then, is not the fact that we think, and that we undoubtedly know this, but the explanation of this natural phenomenon that is consciousness, which everyone undoubtedly experiences.

Explaining consciousness is all the more important for Spinozism because the mind is no longer considered as a thing that thinks by itself, that is in itself and does not require the concept of another thing to be understood (the mind is no longer a *substance*), but as a modality, and a modality that must be considered in a double relation (*rapport*): not only

⁵ It will be noted that in this instance the words *conscius* and *conscientia* do not appear; but when reading these passages it is clear that the idea of the idea is identified with consciousness, as the following sections of the *Ethics* will also confirm.

in its relation with the attribute of thought, but also in its relation with an object of thought. The mind is first and foremost in relation with thought, which precedes it logically and ontologically, like a principle and its consequence, a cause and its effect—which implies that the mind is a simple idea, determined by other ideas, that is, by other modalities of this same substantial attribute of thought. But the mind is also in relation with an object of thought, which means that if the mind is simply an idea it is not a simple idea, since it is composed of at least all the ideas of the affections of its body, the object of the mind. When considered in this respect, the mind is certainly not causally determined (since it is the other modalities of the attribute of Thought, other ideas, and not the body, that encourage the mind to think); however, the ideas or the thoughts that the mind is determined to form in this way have something of the body in their content: namely either that which takes place in the body (a corporeal event, an affection, which is the first kind of knowledge), or that which constitutes this body (as common properties with other bodies, or as a singular essence, which are the second and third kinds of knowledge).

But, then, if the mind is only the idea of a body, is consciousness anything other than this idea of a body living, existing in actuality, anything other than the thought of an affected and affecting body? What is specific about it? What is its particular strength? Can consciousness free itself from the thought of the body, and be conscious of itself? In other words, if the Spinozist *cogito* (let us assume that this is not a scandalous expression) is the *cogito* of the body, if the *cogito* is only the cogitation or the thought of an affected body, and if—let us not forget—the Spinozist *cogito* is the expression of collective thinking (of a *cogitamus*), how then can we explain self-consciousness, a self understood as a mental reality that is in the process of thinking, and that is therefore in the process of thinking *itself* (*se penser*)? Such a question is raised by what one might call Spinozist materialism: that is, a non-reductionist materialism that does not make thought a simple emanation or function of the body, but that naturalizes the mind to the point that it is a (mental) automatism in the same way that the functioning of the body is a physical automatism; and an automatism, moreover, that is social in nature, and whose sole object of thought is the body, that is, what happens to it or what it is. How can one grasp the origin and the nature of consciousness on the basis of such a materialism?

It is surprising to note that, when posed in this way, this question is very close to that which Vygotsky, in a completely different intellectual universe, and with entirely different terminology, formulates in Soviet Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. If such a parallel can be drawn between Spinozist philosophy and Vygotskian psychology, it is first and foremost because it stems from the history of ideas. Vygotsky was a great reader of Spinoza: he is the central reference in one of Vygotsky's last works, *The Teaching about Emotions* (1999: 71–245)—which was almost

called simply *Spinoza*⁴—and he makes some important references to Spinozist thought in his other books.⁵ But if the bringing together of Spinoza and Vygotsky has any pertinence beyond the history of the reception of Spinozism, it is because comparing these two thinkers brings to light the extent of the problem that both of them worked on in their own respective contexts—namely, to account for the irreducibility of consciousness in a (philosophical or psychological) theory that naturalizes mental life, and seeks to explain it in a determinist manner, as one would causally explain the life of the body.

In Russia in the 1920s, Vygotsky was working within the paradigm of reflexological psychology, which was taken to Russia by Ivan Pavlov, and to a lesser extent by Vladimir Bekhterev (the two were working, each independently, on the production of a conditional, that is, an acquired, reflex). In his first works Vygotsky employs a reflexological conceptuality, but criticizes the behaviorist psychology of Pavlov and also of the American behaviorists for its denial of consciousness. He does so most notably in a lecture entitled “Consciousness as a Problem for the Psychology of Behavior” (Vygotsky 1997b). The first major negative consequence of such a denial of consciousness is that it renders psychology insensitive to the complexity of human behavior, reducing it to the level of animal behavior—and as Vygotsky explains, the laws of animal behavior do not apply to human behavior (which does not mean that the latter does not obey strictly determined laws) (1997b: 64–65). The second important consequence is that “the denial of consciousness and the aspiration to create a psychological system without this concept, as a ‘psychology without consciousness’” (1997b: 64), leads one to overlook internal movements, to overlook what the subject says to itself (to overlook internal speech). Such a dimension absolutely must be taken into consideration for humans: Vygotsky insists on the fact that the experiment on Pavlov’s dog, in which the conditional salivary reflex was developed (notably through associating food with the ringing of a bell, then causing the salivary reflex through just the sound of the bell without presenting the food), followed a clear procedure—“We put the dog on the stand, we tie it with straps,” in short, “we, as a preliminary, organize its behavior using external means in the well-known way—otherwise the experiment would not succeed” (1997b: 64; translation modified). In the same way, Vygotsky continues, “we, as a preliminary, organize a subject’s behavior through certain internal movements—through instruction, clarification, etc. And when these internal movements suddenly change in the course of the experiment the whole

⁴ The Spinozism of this unfinished work goes beyond the limits of this article, and would require a detailed and sustained analysis, which will be saved for a forthcoming study.

⁵ We cannot note all Vygotsky’s explicit references to Spinoza here. For an initial consideration of their importance, see Gisele Toassa (2014).

picture of the behavior changes abruptly” (1997b: 64). One must therefore take into account this mental interiority that is likely to cause new internal movements, the “I think” of the subject of the experiment. Indeed, consciousness is an important determinant in behavior itself. “To put it more simply,” Vygotsky concludes, “man always thinks to himself. This will always influence his behavior. A sudden change of thought during the experiment will always have immediate repercussions for the whole of the subject’s behavior (suddenly a thought: I will not look into the apparatus). But we have no idea how to take this influence into account” (1997b: 64).

For Vygotsky the final major negative consequence of reflexological psychology’s concealment or obscuring of consciousness is that such an oversight leads back to a substance dualism, and to the sciences that study them: on the one hand there is a behavioral psychology without the mind, a “objective psychology,” like reflexology, what Vygotsky also calls a “physiology of the brain” (1997c: 109–10),⁶ and on the other hand a psychology of the mind without behavior, that might be either the old spiritualist psychology that was founded on introspection and against which scientific psychology was established, or the so-called comprehensive or descriptive psychology that Vygotsky identifies with Husserl’s psychology, or that of his master Brentano, or even a new science that would have to be developed, subjective reflexology. In every case, however, “mind and behavior are understood as two different phenomena” (1997b: 65; translation modified).

Reflex of the body and reflexivity of the consciousness

What was original about Vygotsky at this time—and which also reveals his debt or his fidelity to Spinoza—was to conceive the psychological phenomenon as a unitary phenomenon, inextricably psychological and physical.⁷ Or to put it differently: behavior is not simply a matter of the

⁶ In this paper, entitled “Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious,” Vygotsky later asserts: “Such expressions as ‘an ardent desire for food,’ ‘the dog remembered,’ and ‘the dog guessed’ were strictly banned from his laboratory and a special fine was introduced for those collaborators who during their work resorted to such psychological expressions to explain a certain act of the animal” (1997c: 110). “In other words, Pavlov demonstrated that an objective physiological study of behavior which ignores mental life is in any case possible for the animal, but in principle for people as well” (1997c: 110–11).

⁷ Vygotsky asks, regarding a critique of the Freudian idea that the unconscious, as a part of the mind, would be capable of producing actions: “But is it really true that a conscious mental phenomenon can directly cause an action? For, as we have said above, in all cases where mental phenomena were held responsible for an action, we were dealing with actions that were carried out by the whole psychophysiological inte-

body, it also concerns the mind—and consciousness in particular.⁸ This is why Vygotsky, even if he thinks in terms of reflex in his definition of consciousness, feels able to criticize such a concept: “‘Reflex’ is an abstract concept. From the methodological viewpoint it is extremely valuable but it cannot become the fundamental concept of psychology viewed as the concrete science of human behavior [...] [M]an is not at all a skin sack filled with reflexes and the brain is not a hotel for conditional reflexes that happen to pass by” (1997b: 66). How, then, does Vygotsky conceive of consciousness, once it is assumed that the abstraction of this concept of reflex, which is its flaw, nonetheless also enables one to describe phenomena of the mind, mental reflexivity?

It is here that one discovers a similar tension in both Vygotsky and Spinoza. On the one hand, Spinoza defines consciousness as simply the idea of the idea, explaining, in his own terms (that is, in a conceptuality that goes through God—or Nature—conceived as the immanent principle by which to explain all things), that there is in God an idea of the human mind which follows in the same way as the idea of the human body. *The idea of the mind* follows in God, and is related to God, affirms Proposition 20 of Part II of the *Ethics*, in the same way—*eodem modo*: in the same mode!—as *the idea of the human body*. In other words, the idea of this idea that is the mind is the same divine mode, or the same idea, as the idea of the body, that is, as the mind: consciousness conceived as the idea of the idea is the same mode of thinking as the mind, being itself identical to the body, but conceived under another attribute, under another kind of being (the mind is conceived through the attribute of thought, the body through that of extension). To put in another way: Between consciousness and the body there is for Spinoza a real identity, but a modal difference; however between the mind and consciousness there is not even this modal difference—there is just a rational distinction.⁹ What do we mean by this? A rational distinction, Spinoza explains in Part II, Chapter 3 of *Metaphysical Thoughts* (1985: 319–21), is a distinction that helps to understand a thing better, that is, that thinks it under two different relations, even though this thing in itself is simple.¹⁰ What are, in our case, these two different

gral process and not only by its mental side.” From this follows his conclusion: “Only dialectical psychology, by claiming that the subject matter of psychology is not what is psychophysically neutral but the psycho-physiological unitary integral phenomenon that we provisionally call the psychological phenomenon, is capable of indicating the way out [of the blind alley]” (1997c: 119–20). *The psychological, for Vygotsky, is thus the psychophysical*.

⁸ “Consciousness is the problem of the structure of behavior” (Vygotsky 1997b: 67).

⁹ As is confirmed by the Demonstration of Proposition 8 of Part IV of the *Ethics* and Proposition 3 of Part V of the *Ethics*.

¹⁰ The mind is, of course, a simple thing with regard to this double consideration, and not with regard to the whole set of parts that form it.

relations? The mind, as the idea, can be considered either in its relation with an object, or in its relation with itself: considered in its objective being (in its relation with an object), the mind is the idea of the body, the feeling (*sentiment*) of the movements of its body, and therefore the representations of exterior objects; considered in its formal being (in its relation with itself), the mind is a modality of the attribute of thought, that is, the idea, and therefore the idea that is the object of itself, the idea of the idea. Such is the somewhat sibylline assertion of the scholium to Proposition 21 of Part II of the *Ethics*: “for the idea of the mind, that is, the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object” (Spinoza 1996: 48). Spinoza’s idea of the idea is often explained as an idea that has itself as its object, that has as its object not the body and its movements, but itself as a modality of thought. Spinoza himself does not explain things entirely as such: to say that for him the idea of the idea is the form of the idea is to say that this idea of the idea is not so much the idea that has itself as its object, as the idea that is an object for itself. When speaking of the idea of the mind, Spinoza certainly speaks of an idea that has the mind as its object; but when saying that it is nothing other than the form of the idea, he asserts that *this idea of the idea, which has itself as its object*, is at bottom nothing other than *the idea that is an object for itself*. The idea of the idea is an idea that has itself as its object (an idea that thinks itself) because, fundamentally, it is an idea that provides *itself* to itself as its object (idea that is thought by itself): the genitive *ideæ idea* is objective because it is subjective. At bottom, then, there is only one single and same idea (the idea of the idea is not another idea so much as the idea *tout court*: it is the very ideal of the idea, conscious of itself [*conscient de soi*]), and this idea can be understood either as the idea of the object or as the object of the idea—or as the idea of the object insofar as it is the idea of the body, or as the object of the idea insofar as it is the object of itself.

In short, there is a sort of reflexive reflexivity of the idea, that in thinking thinks itself think, or in feeling feels itself feel—or even, for this is what interests Spinoza most, that in understanding understands itself to understand. However, “simple” may seem like an odd description for a thing—in this case, the mind—that could be understood either as the idea of the body, or as the idea of self, that is, either as the thought or feeling of the body, or as the thought or feeling of self. Gueroult was very aware of this difficulty, to the point that in his commentary of Proposition 21 of Part II of the *Ethics*, he begins by affirming that the idea of the idea is entirely different to the idea itself, whereas he finishes by recognizing, through appealing above all to the scholium of this Proposition 21, that the idea and its consciousness are in fact one and the same mode: for him, the gnoseological order of deduction emphasizes distinction (there is first the idea by which God knows the body, then another idea, that by which he knows the mind), whereas the ontological order of the real places

greater emphasis on identity (Gueroult 1974: 247–56). Even if one cannot entirely agree with this view of things,¹¹ it nonetheless seems that Gueroult appreciates a tension in Spinoza, which consists not so much in the difference between the order of deduction and the order of being, but in the fact of being able to distinguish two dimensions in a thing (the relation to self and the relation to a thing), which nonetheless does not alter the simplicity of the thing.

This possibility of distinguishing two relations within an otherwise simple thing is a point Spinoza insists on, however, as is confirmed by a letter from Simon de Vries, in which the latter explains to Spinoza the functioning of the small workgroup, the Spinozist seminar, which was set up to read the first versions of the *Ethics*: “I adduced as an example what you, Sir, said to me at the Hague, namely, that a thing can be considered in two ways, either as it is in itself, or as it is in relation to something else” (1966: 103–04). In a way, all Spinozism is governed by this tension, which consists of thinking difference within the very interior of identity, and identity within the very interior of difference: thinking attributive difference (real difference) within the very interior of substantial identity (and thinking substantial identity together with attributive difference); thinking the modal difference between the body and the mind within the very interior of the real identity (and thinking this real identity only in modal difference); thinking the conceptual difference between the idea and the idea of the idea within the very interior of modal identity (but thinking in turn this modal identity as requiring a rational distinction). To consider difference in identity and identity in difference in this manner is one of the ways in which to think several things at the same time, so as to think them distinctly, that is, to understand their agreements, differences and oppositions.¹²

Now, one must remember that this reflexive, automatic reflexivity of the idea, by which it thinks itself think, takes place through *the same cognitive act* by which this idea thinks an object: the idea thinks itself think *in thinking something*, it thinks itself think at the same time as it thinks something, and even *insofar as* it thinks something. Spinoza states this explicitly in Proposition 23 of Part II: “The mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body” (1996: 49). In other words, there is no *cogito* that is not a *cogito corporis affectionem*: there is no “I think” that is not an “I think a corporal affection,” an “I think a movement of my body.” This assertion must be understood under

¹¹ Martial Gueroult does not seem to see that in the very order of deduction Spinoza asserts that God has the idea of both the body and the mind in the same way, that is, through the same mode—*eodem modo*.

¹² Simultaneous plural thought is the condition of an adequate—that is, a clear and distinct—thought of the relations between things. On this point, see in particular the scholia to Propositions 13 and 29 of Part II of the *Ethics*.

two conditions: the first is to see clearly that consciousness of a corporal affection—when I think of an external body—is not just consciousness of a corporal affection (the “I think” a corporal affection is at the same time an “I imagine a body as being in my presence”). The second condition, as we have seen, is to remember that Spinoza does not in fact say *cogito*, but *humana mens cogitat* (or *homo cogitat*), since if I think, it is because I am determined by other ideas, and if I think a corporal affection, it is because my body is affected by other bodies. The “I” of the *cogito* is thus not personal; it is plural, multiplied or increased, anonymized—it is a *mens* linked to other ideas, rather than an “I,” strictly speaking. The thinking subject is therefore populated or filled (*peuplé*), it is biologically and culturally determined by a collectivity—what thinks is human, impersonal or better still: trans-personal (“*homo*,” “*humana mens*”).¹³

Vygotsky reaches the same conclusions in his own intellectual field, that is to say, in the first instance, the same tension: on one hand, he highlights the necessity of taking into account the phenomenon of consciousness in psychological theory and experimental practice; on the other hand, he highlights the elusive nature of this consciousness. “Thus consciousness as a specific category, as a *specific mode of being*, is not found. It proves to be a very complex structure of behavior, in particular, the doubling of behavior” (1997b: 79; own emphasis added, translation modified). This is an odd formulation: in two successive phrases, Vygotsky seems to say one thing and its opposite—consciousness is and is not something specific. On the one hand consciousness does not exist as a specific mode of being, on the other hand it exists as a real structure of behavior that depends on its doubling: such are the two poles of the tension created by the problem of consciousness.¹⁴ Let us explain them here.

—In order to assert that consciousness does not exist as a “specific mode of being,” a formula to which Spinoza subscribes to the letter, Vygotsky refers to William James, first and foremost to his *Principles of Psychology*. “Whenever I try to become sensible of my thinking activity as such,” James notes, “what I catch is some bodily fact, an impression coming from my brow, or head, or throat, or nose” (1997b: 78). Is this not a way of saying that the mind only knows itself in perceiving the affections of its body (what’s more, here affections do not refer to objects of the world, but to the actual body itself)? And Vygotsky continues by citing the end of

¹³ Here we use “trans-personal” in the sense of “trans-individual,” to distinguish between thought considered in itself, as a substantial or dynamic attribute in the production of ideas (a thought that is peculiar to no one, *impersonal thought*), and thought considered in its relation with people, that only ever exclusively belongs to a individual when it is also in relation with other individuals (*trans-personal thought*).

¹⁴ Yves Clot similarly speaks of what he calls the “enigma” of consciousness: “Here lies the enigma: consciousness does not exist, despite the fact that, in another respect, it is very real” (2003: 11).

James' famous essay, "Does Consciousness Exist?": "I am as confident as I am of anything," James says, "that, in myself, the stream of thinking [...] is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing. The 'I think' which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the 'I breathe' which actually does accompany them [...] thoughts [...] are made of the same stuff as things are" (1997b: 79). The detour through James allows Vygotsky to emphasize the real identity between consciousness and things, between mental activity and physical affections, between the stream of consciousness and the corporal stream of breathing.

—On the other hand, however, Vygotsky analyzes the specificity of consciousness as a structure of behavior, and within it he sees a phenomenon of doubling. He begins first by emphasizing the conflictual dimension of relations between reflexes,¹⁵ their possible inhibition or their possible victory, which leads him to say that "all behavior is a struggle that does not abate for a minute" (Vygotsky 1997b: 69). And what does this struggle of reflexes produce in the body? Some are "defeats," that is, they remain unaccomplished, unfinished, or uncompleted—possible, in a way, but in the sense of an arrested, inhibited reality;¹⁶ others, which are victorious, by contrast, are linked together and enter into a "system of reflexes." Some reflexes are thus transmitted from one system to another; some reflexes, which are reactions, become stimuli for other reflexes—the association of reflexes thereby also being a causal relation. "The howling of the wolf," Vygotsky says, "as a stimulus causes me to react with somatic and mimic reflexes of fear. The altered respiration, heartbeat, trembling and dry throat compel me to say or think: I am afraid. Here we see transmission from one system to another" (1997b: 71). It is this chain or sequence of corporal reflexes, being transmitted from one system to another, one giving rise to another, that accounts for growing awareness—we are sure to say "growing," since for Vygotsky there are different degrees of awareness or consciousness. Any consciousness, as we shall see, is not

¹⁵ "In the organism there will always emerge a struggle between the different receptors for the common motor path, for the possession of one effector organ. The outcome of this struggle depends on many very complex and diverse factors. Thus, it turns out that each realized reaction, each victorious reflex, emerges after a struggle, after a conflict at 'the point of collision' (Sherrington)" (Vygotsky 1997b: 69). This insistence on the conflictual dimension of behavior is another point that Spinoza and Vygotsky have in common: both see the body as a genuine battlefield between reflexes and affects, and consciousness as a mental expression of this somatic conflict.

¹⁶ "Realized behavior is an insignificant part of all possible behavior. Man is every minute full of unrealized possibilities" (Vygotsky 1997b: 70). These possibilities are not so much a pure unreal (that which could be without actually being) than an unfinished or uncompleted real: "they are just as real as the triumphant reactions" (Vygotsky 1997b: 70). See also Clot (2003: 22).

sovereign, transparent to itself; it can be highly confused, close to the unconscious depending on the defeat or the narrow victory of the reflex in question, or much more clear, vivid, once it accompanies a reflex which is the driving force. As Vygotsky explains:

The psychological unconscious stands for reflexes that are not transmitted to other systems. There can be endlessly varied degrees of awareness, i.e., of cooperation between the systems included in the mechanism of the acting reflex. To be conscious of one's experiences is nothing other than to have them as object (stimulus) for other experiences. *Consciousness is the experience of experiences just like experiences are simply experiences of objects* (1997b: 71–72; own emphasis added).

Consciousness and *perezhivanie*

“Consciousness is the experience of experiences”: this assertion is fundamental, and we must fully grasp its implications. It deploys one of Vygotsky's central concepts: that of *perezhivanie* (*переживание*), translated here as “experience,” but better understood as “lived experience.”¹⁷ What is meant by this concept of *perezhivanie*, and how can consciousness be identified with a *perezhivanie* “squared” (*au carré*), a *perezhivanie* that has other *perezhivaniia* as its object (Vygotsky, 1982a: 89)?¹⁸ A text by Vy-

¹⁷ And translated into French as “*expérience vécue*.” Here I follow René Van der Veer's English translation (1997 b, c) (translator's note).

¹⁸ Vygotsky's notion of consciousness is the subject of an important article by Ekaterina Zavershneva (2014). We disagree with some of her conclusions, however, and will highlight the main one here. Zavershneva identifies three models in the Vygotskian theorization of consciousness: the first is the model of consciousness as reflex of reflexes (1924–26); the second is the model of consciousness as the system of secondary connections between higher psychological functions (1927–31); the third is the model of consciousness as dynamic semantic system (1932–34). Analyzing this last model, Zavershneva asserts that from 1933–34 Vygotsky no longer analyzed consciousness through the category of “sense” (or of word meaning—sense being, according to Zavershneva's expression, the result of an operation that was mediated through a sign, the result of a “sign-mediated operation”), but through a new specific unit, that of *perezhivanie*. Yet, as we have shown here, this category of *perezhivanie* is present from Vygotsky's very first works (“Consciousness as a Problem for the Psychology of Behavior,” which dates from 1925). Moreover, when she analyzes the first model of consciousness, Zavershneva cites an extract from “The Methods of Reflexological and Psychological Investigation” (Vygotsky 1997a: 35–50). But she fails to note that this extract, which defines consciousness as a system of transmission mechanisms from some reflexes to others, appears before an identification of consciousness with the experience of experiences, in a passage (dating from 1926) that largely repeats one from “Consciousness as a Problem for the Psychology of Behavior” (which dates from 1925): “Indeed conscious awareness itself, or the possibility of becoming conscious of our acts and mental states,

gotsky, translated into English as “The Problem of the Environment” (1995) and analyzed in a precise (and valuable) way by Nikolai Veresov (2014), enables us to shed decisive light on *perezhivanie*.¹⁹ Vygotsky’s thesis in this text is that, in order to understand the role of the social environment in the psychological development of a child, one must not consider this environment alone, like an absolute cause, of which the child would be the pure effect, but rather pay attention to the relation that is formed between the environment and the child. The cause that determines the development of a child is not the environment as such, but the manner in which the environment is experienced by the child: the child is not the inert, isolated effect of environmental determination; it takes part, on the basis of the determination of the environment [exerted] on it, in the very causality of its own development. The development of the child is thus determined by the manner in which the social environment modifies the actual activity of the child, and it does so according to the child’s age and its ability to understand what it is going through.

To demonstrate this point, Vygotsky takes the example of three children brought to his research institute who had been living in the same traumatic environment—namely, with a depressive, alcoholic mother who was extremely violent towards them (she would push them to the ground

must evidently be understood, first of all, as a system of transmission mechanisms from some reflexes to others which functions properly in each conscious moment. The more correctly each internal reflex, as a stimulus, elicits a whole series of other reflexes from other systems, is transmitted to other systems—the better we are capable of accounting for ourselves and others for what is *experienced*, the more consciously it is *experienced* (felt, fixed in words, etc.). ‘To account for’ means to translate some reflexes into others. The psychological unconscious stands for reflexes that are not transmitted to other systems. Endlessly varied degrees of conscious awareness, i.e., of interactions of systems included in the system of the acting reflex, are possible. Being conscious of one’s *experiences* means nothing more than having them as an object (a stimulus) for other *experiences*. Consciousness is the *experience of experiences* in precisely the same way as *experience* is simply the *experience of objects*. But precisely this, the capacity of the reflex (the *experience of an object*) to be a stimulus (the object of an *experience*) for a new reflex (a new *experience*)—this mechanism of conscious awareness is the mechanism of the transmission of reflexes from one system to another” (Vygotsky 1997a: 40–41; own emphasis added). See Vygotsky (1982b: 50): “*soznanie est’ perezhivanie perezhivanii* [consciousness is the experience of experiences],” a formula that can already be found in Vygotsky (1982a: 89). For us, the definition of consciousness based on the idea of *perezhivanie* does not appear late in Vygotsky’s work, nor do we think that Vygotsky “changes” his definition (or his “model”) of consciousness, between his early and late writings. Rather, we think that across his different writings, Vygotsky develops the same definition, which he reworks and modifies according to the questions he is asking himself and the contexts in which he is working.

¹⁹ “The Problem of the Environment” is a late text (from 1933–34); according to the editors it originates from notes taken by students at one of Vygotsky’s lectures (rather than being written by Vygotsky himself).

in order to beat them, and even tried to throw one out of a window). And yet each of these three children, though confronted with similar circumstances, behaved very differently. The youngest, who was developing neurotic symptoms of defense, was overwhelmed by the horror of the situation, and was having panic and enuresis attacks and speech impediments; the second child was plunged into an intense affective ambivalence towards his mother: he hated her intensely, and was also strongly attached to her; finally the third child, and the eldest at ten/eleven years old, had completely unexpected behavior: although rather intellectually limited, he had clearly understood the situation, and played the role of a protector or guardian in the family, towards both his brothers and his mother.

Vygotsky poses the question: How could the same environment have such a different influence on each child? And on the face of it his response is not particularly illuminating, if not simply tautological: it is because each child has a different attitude towards the situation. Of course, many will object, but precisely why does each behave differently? Vygotsky nevertheless insists: because each child has experienced, as the English translation states—or, as Nikolai Veresov shows, “*perezhivat*” in the original Russian—the situation in a different way.²⁰ It is therefore the different *perezhivanie* of each child, even though they are faced with the same environment, which explains the respective singularity of their behavior. What is meant by this *perezhivanie*? As many translators have reminded us, beginning with Françoise Sève, the term is the Russian equivalent of the German *Erlebnis*, the root of which is *leben*, to live. *Perezhivanie* is the singular “lived experience” (*le vécu*) of each child, of its particular “emotional experience.” But as Nikolai Veresov shows when reminding us of the various interpretations of this notion, *perezhivanie* not only has an emotional dimension, it also has a cognitive one; it certainly encompasses a way of feeling or experiencing the environment, but it is also a way of imagining it, of being conscious or aware of it. *Perezhivanie* designates precisely, as Vygotsky says at several points in his article on “The Problem of the Environment,” and as Nikolai Veresov points out, the “prism” that is peculiar to the child, in which the social environment to which this child is linked is refracted. To employ a Spinozist notion that seems particularly appropriate here, we might say that *perezhivanie* designates the “modification” that the environment exerts on the child, and the explanation for which certainly depends on factors that are constitutive of this environment, but also on the child’s actual being.

If one appeals to the ontology of power that underpins the Spinozist understanding of human nature—if, in short, one borrows from Spinoza’s philosophical anthropology—one might say that environmental determi-

²⁰ As Nikolai Veresov observes, “the verb *переживать* [*perezhivat*] appears everywhere” in this passage (2014: 221, n. 34).

nation is a modification of the child's power of life, a modification that expresses both the causal power of the milieu and the causal power of the child itself. In other words, the determination produced by the milieu depends on the determination peculiar to the child, of its own determinant power: causality is thus reciprocal, since the causality of the environmental cause depends to a certain extent on the causality of the effect (that is, the child); the influence of the environment, in the sense of exterior causality, only produces an effect (a *perezhivanie*) in the child insofar as it acts with or against—but in any case only insofar as it is modified by—the force of life peculiar to the child. In short, the *modification* that is the *perezhivanie* is not only a modification in the child produced by the environment, but a modification of the environmental causality through the actual activity of the child.

Now, if *perezhivanie* is the manner in which the “elements” of the environment are modified in the psycho-physical individuality of the child, if the *perezhivanie* is this cognitivo-emotional modification of the child through which the power of external causes express themselves in and through the power of the child, then we might say that this *perezhivanie* is the manner in which “necessity is made a virtue”—a virtue that is sometimes highly limited and powerless, as in the case of the youngest child, or a virtue that is much more efficient and powerful, as in the case of the eldest child. And above all, if *perezhivanie* is this cognitive and emotional modification through which the power of the milieu is expressed in the individual, or provides direction for the very power of this individual, then *perezhivanie* corresponds exactly to what Spinoza thinks under the category of *affectus*. *Perezhivanie* means Affect in the Spinozist sense.

To be sure, what is an affect for Spinoza? It is a modification in an individual's power of acting, understood at once by the causality of an exterior thing (the milieu, the child's environment) and by the very causality of whomever is affected by this exteriority (here the child).²¹ The Affect (*affectus*) is therefore a variation of power (as mental as it is physical), a transition in its power of acting (from an inferior state to a superior state, or the reverse) that is produced by an encounter with an exterior

²¹ The definition that we give here corresponds precisely to that of the affect that is a passion, that is, to the type of affect most commonly experienced by people. But even in the case of the affect that is an action (the affect through which an individual acts and no longer is acted on), that is, even in the case of the affect of which the individual is the adequate or total cause, exteriority remains determinant. We cannot develop this decisive point here; we shall return to it in forthcoming study (I have examined the presence of this very exterior causality in adequate causality in Severac [2005]). On adequate and inadequate causality, on acting and being acted on, and on the nature of the affect, see the three definitions in Part III of the *Ethics*.

causality.²² The Spinozist Affect, like the Vygotskian *perezhivanie*, is therefore very much a “prism” or a “mode” (a modification) through which the exteriority is expressed in and by the interiority of the affected subject; it is, like *perezhivanie*, the experience of a variation of power—this idea of “passage” or “transition” being implied in the term *perezhivanie*;²³ and like *perezhivanie*, the Spinozist Affect is not only an emotional experience, but a total psycho-physical phenomenon that envelops a cognitive dimension. The affect is the idea (understood as a modality of the power of the mind), and even the idea of the object, the representation of a thing understood (or “imagined” according to Spinoza’s word) as the cause of the affect. “There are no modes of thinking,” Axiom 3 of Part II of the *Ethics* affirms, “such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind, unless there is in the same individual the idea of the loved, desired, and the like. But there can be an idea, even though there is no other mode of thinking” (Spinoza 1996: 32). The affect is therefore without doubt as much a cognitive experience that implies other psychological functions like memory, imagination, attention, as it is an emotional experience.

Spinoza goes even further: the affect is what judges, what evaluates *par excellence*. Indeed, its cognitive power is expressed in the fact that the affect, as consciousness of an object, is a value judgment—through sadness, the thing is posited as bad, through joy, as good. Indeed, therein lies one of Spinozism’s major ideas: it is not value judgment as such that drives desire, but desire that affirms a value judgment.²⁴ In the same way, *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky tells us, is an interpretation of the environment (1995: 341): that which can be understood as an affective evaluation of the situation in terms of the good and the evil, or good and bad.

²² According to Definition 3 in Part III of the *Ethics*: “By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. *Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion*” (Spinoza 1996: 70).

²³ Yves Bonin, the French translator of Veresov’s article, highlights this point: “*Perezhivanie* [...] In Russian this term evokes “discontinuity,” a “passage” or “transition” [*pere-*], in which a subject is affected by an exterior event” (2014: 210, n. 4). Indeed we find the prefix *pere-* in the terms *perehod* (meaning “transition,” “passage”), *pere-sechenie* (“crossing”), *perelet* (“airplane flight”).

²⁴ See Part IV of the *Ethics*, Proposition 8: “The knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it” (Spinoza 1996: 120). And on the major idea that an affect is what produces value judgments, see *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 9, scholium: “we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire, anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, desire it” (Spinoza 1996: 76); see also *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 39, scholium.

Now, once we identify *perezhivanie* with affect in the Spinozist sense, it becomes possible to re-read the *perezhivaniia* Vygotsky speaks of regarding the three children based on Spinozist analyses of certain affective configurations.

Thus, the *perezhivaniia* of the youngest child, comprising of despondency or dejection and withdrawal, can be identified with the affect *consternatio* (which might be translated as “fear” [*épouvante*], “alarm,” “terror”). *Consternatio* is attributed, according to Definition 42 at the end of Part III of the *Ethics*, “to one whose desire to avoid an evil is restrained by wonder [*admiratio*] at the evil he fears” (Spinoza 1996: 111).²⁵ Spinoza’s explanation of this definition states that *consternatio* is born of a double fear: Fear of a first evil that is so strong that it prevents the mind from thinking and throws it into this form of break and mental disconnection that is “wonder” (in this case the wonder at the mother’s violence); and fear of another evil that could sometimes even be the means of escaping the first (this might be through the mother dying, or at least through the child being separated from her). Spinoza, in the explanation of Definition 42 of Part III of the *Ethics*, explains *consternatio* as follows: it is “a fear which keeps a man stupefied or vacillating [*stupefactum aut fluctuantem*] so that he cannot avert the evil. I say *stupefied* insofar as we understand that his desire to avert the evil is restrained by wonder, and *vacillating* insofar as we conceive that that desire is restrained by timidity regarding another evil, which torments him equally, so that he does not know which of these two to avert” (1996: 111; translation modified). In the case of the youngest of the three children, it is not even clear if he has the mental strength (*force*) to envisage being separated from the mother, a removing or death of the cause of his suffering. The terrified wonder at his mother’s violence is itself enough to numb in him any idea of a possible way out: it is not even the fear of the solution that terrifies him; it is the haunting power

²⁵ “*Consternatio dicitur de eo, cupiditas malum vitandi coërcetur admiratio mali, quod timet*” (Spinoza 1988: 326). This definition itself appeals to other figures of affectivity, to *admiratio* and *timor*. In the language of the seventeenth century, *admiratio*, or wonder, means astonishment, stupefaction, and is defined by Spinoza as the following: it is, according to Definition IV at the end of Part III of the *Ethics*, “an imagination of a thing in which the mind remains fixed because this singular imagination has no connection with the others” (1996: 105) (indeed on this point we will speak of a figure of passivity rather than affectivity, since Spinoza explains that wonder, as a cessation [*un arrêt*] and not a passage or transition, is not an affect). As for *timor*, which might be translated as “timidity,” it is, according to Definition 39, “a desire to avoid a greater evil, which we fear [*quod metuimus*], by a lesser one” (1996: 111). Spinoza thus distinguishes between timidity (*timor*) and fear (*metus*), the latter not being a desire but a sadness (according to Definition 13, “fear is an inconstant sadness, born of the idea of a future or past thing whose outcome we to some extent doubt” [1996: 106], that is, not to the point that sadness would be compensated by the joy of hope—even if there is hope in every fear, and fear in every hope).

(force) of the situation into which he had been plunged. One could say that his fear, that is, his desire to avoid this greater evil through a lesser evil, is barely formed, insofar as he does not have the strength to imagine this other evil, which does not seem any lesser to him. If *consternatio* seizes someone who is “stupefied or vacillating”—and if one can read an alternative in this formulation²⁶—then the small child does not experience vacillation between two conceptions of evil, but stupefaction at the horror of a single evil. His *perezhivanie* thereby corresponds in every respect to the first characterization of *consternatio* given by Spinoza in the scholium to Proposition 52 of Part III of the *Ethics* (therefore before the definition of this affect, which we have already used, and which appears in the appendix of the third part) defining wonder as an “affection of the mind, or [an] imagination of a singular thing, insofar as it is alone in the mind,” Spinoza explains: “if it is aroused by an object we fear, it is called *consternation* [*consternatio*], because wonder at evil keeps a man so suspended [*suspensum*] in considering it that he cannot think of other things by which he could avoid that evil” (1996: 97).

Such is the situation in which the youngest child finds himself: he is completely overawed by his mother’s violence, and his inability to link the imagination of his suffering to the imagination of a means to avoid it is no doubt reinforced, if not fully determined, by his weak cognitive development. One could say that such a *perezhivanie* is a modality of obsession, of a retreat into sadness: it is a dread (*horreur*)²⁷ that is limited to the highly confused imagination of the evil that is experienced. As a result the child is powerless to envisage the means to break free or detach himself from it (*s’en déprendre*), and even less so to understand the origins of such dread: he is overwhelmed by such a *perezhivanie*, blinded by it. Hence a very poor awareness (*conscience*) of the situation, and a very weak power of acting within it: the child is despondent (*abattu*), his very speech is disturbed and disrupted, even stopping altogether. He stutters and stammers, Vygotsky tell us in fact, and this stuttering and stammering is like the psychological translation of a “repetition with repetition,” of a repetition that does not produce an action, an activity of self-affirmation, but that is a constant repetition, that contains no transition or passage to another thing, that presents an impasse for the power of acting.²⁸ Sometimes in

²⁶ This seems entirely possible, given that the Latin expression “*stupefactum aut fluctuantem*” employs “*aut*,” which (unlike “*sive*”) usually implies disjunction, not identification.

²⁷ The scholium to Proposition 52 of Part III of the *Ethics* also says: “if what we wonder at is the man’s anger” (1996: 97) (toward the mother, in this case), then this wonder is called dread (*horror*).

²⁸ The expression used here, “repetition with repetition,” goes against that by which Nikolai Bernstein defines a correct repetition, namely a “repetition without repetition” (which is a favorite expression of Yves Clot: see for example 2003 and 2008).

fact, Vygotsky explains, the child completely loses the power of speech, “he loses his voice”—to lose one’s voice being the very “expression” of stupefaction, of being prohibited from thinking, and therefore from transmitting or passing to another thing.

In short, the first child is completely unable to transmit or pass to *perezhivanie* squared, to the *perezhivanie* that has its own *perezhivaniia* as its object, that is, an affective consciousness that takes its own affects of fear as its objects: he does not transmit or pass to a slightly clearer awareness of the situation, that at the same time would be the possible assertion of power over it. His desire to act is barred or blocked, his ability to affect and to be affected is entirely absorbed in his terror; his reflexes—beginning with his words—are frozen, ossified—at best they can repeat themselves, but they are unable to change system, to associate, to signify. The youngest child thus has no affective awareness of the situation other than that which is ensnared in his own *perezhivanie*, in the impasse of his *consternatio*.

The second child, meanwhile, experiences another *perezhivanie*. Or rather, he experiences another form of *consternatio*: a fear that is no longer structured by stupefaction, like his younger brother, but by fluctuation. The prism through which the violence of the situation is expressed in him—and by him—is therefore different: while the *perezhivanie* of the youngest is a *perezhivanie* of sadness alone, that of a fear enclosed within the wonder at evil, the *perezhivanie* of the middle child is certainly composed of sadness (with the idea of the mother as its cause: the child thus

For Bernstein, a corporal skill is acquired through the repetition of a movement, and this repetition, insofar as it gradually allows us to carry out the movement better, is not a passive, identical repetition, but a transformative repetition, which manages to change the repeated movement. Nikolai Bernstein asserts, at the end of essay 6 “On Exercise and Motor Skill”: “...if a student is only repeating his unskilled, clumsy movements, the exercise does not result in any improvement. The essence and objective of exercise is to improve the movements, that is, to change them. Therefore, correct exercise is in fact a *repetition without repetition*” (2009: 204). Bernstein opposes the idea that a motor skill can be acquired in a mechanical and purely repetitive manner, through “beating a trail” or “imprinting a certain trace,” for the simple and good reason that someone who learns to carry out a movement does not know how to do it at first: there is therefore no trail to beat, and it is certainly not a case of imprinting a trace on the basis of initial movements that are false and clumsy. What is repeated is not the means for solving a motor problem, but the process of its solution, through the changing and improving of its means: “The point is that during a correctly organized exercise, a student is repeating many times, *not the means for solving* a given motor problem, but the *process of its solution*, the changing and improving of the means. Obviously, the theory of beating the trail or imprinting is powerless to explain something whose essence and importance are in the fact that it does change. We think that views expressed in this book explain the elaboration and fixation for a motor skill much more correctly” (Bernstein 2009: 205).

experiences tremendous hatred of his mother), but it is also composed of joy: the middle child, whose cognitive and affective development is greater than that of the youngest child, indeed *also* has the idea of his mother as a cause for help, therefore as a cause of joy, that is, as an object of love. For him the mother cannot be reduced to a pure source of violence; she is also without doubt perceived as the person who cares for him, who feeds him, who, despite everything, sometimes brings him joy—and so who loves him in a certain way. Therefore, the affective experience of the second child is that of an internal contradiction, of mental conflict, of an ambivalence that plunges him into both a profound attachment to and a profound rejection of the mother: simultaneous love for and hatred of the mother, an intense oscillation between two opposing affects—in Spinozist terms, the *perezhivanie* of the middle child is a “vacillation of mind” (*fluctuatio animi*), defined in the scholium to Proposition 17 of Part III of the *Ethics* as the “constitution of the mind which arises from two contrary affects” (1996: 80). The child’s power of acting is thus also restrained, he is also, in a way, inhibited from thinking, he experiences, just like his younger brother, a *suspension* of his power: a suspension of the power of acting and of thinking that is nevertheless not owed to a sole affect, structured by wonder, but to the friction and conflict between two contrary affects—a suspension that is not full of wonder, therefore, but fluctuating, that makes him will (*vouloir*) what he does not will (*veut*), and not will what he wills.²⁹ Pierre Macherey calls this affective configuration of *timor*, and rightly so in our opinion, “anxiety” (*angoisse*) (1995: 250, 404). This is precisely what Vygotsky describes when he notes that when the middle child was brought to the institute he immediately demanded to go home, but was terrified when it came to actually doing it: his *consternatio* is manifested as a vacillation between two evils that are at once highly desired and feared—the presence of his mother and her absence.

It is with the third child, the eldest, that we leave the suspension of fear (through wonder or fluctuation). As we have already seen, Vygotsky says that he is intellectually limited—one imagines that his mother’s attempts to bring about his intellectual awakening were themselves limited—but he shows a precocious maturity for his age, composed of serious-

²⁹ See the end of the scholium to Proposition 39 of Part III of the *Ethics*: “this affect, by which a man is so disposed that he does not will what he wills, and wills what he does not will, is called *timidity* [*timor*], which is therefore nothing but *fear* [*metus*] insofar as a man is disposed by it to avoid an evil he judges to be future by encountering a lesser evil.... [I]f the desire to avoid a future evil is restrained by timidity regarding another evil, so that he does not know what he would rather do, then the fear is called *consternation* [*consternatio*], particularly if each evil he fears is of the greatest” (1996: 91; emphasis in original). This further citation from the *Ethics* shows the extent to which Spinoza was interested in analysing the affective experience of *consternatio*.

ness and solicitude. In reality he already understood the situation, Vygotsky tells us. He thus moved from the experience of *trauma* (if he was traumatized) to the experience of possible action within the situation: he goes to the help of his brothers, he feels pity for his mother, and tries to compensate for the devastating effects of her behavior. At bottom, he perceives that she is ill, and that she can therefore be dangerous for her children and for herself. To hate or detest her would not properly change the situation; his empathy is far better at doing so. So what is the *perezhivanie* of this child? In Spinozist terms, it could be called “benevolence,” that is, according to definition 35 at the end of Part III of the *Ethics*, “a desire to benefit one whom we pity” (1996: 110). The eldest no doubt understood what true maturity really demands, namely the “principle of living” that is so simple, and yet so difficult to implement: “that hate is to be conquered by love, or nobility, not by repaying it with hate in return” (Spinoza 1996: 167).³⁰

In short, the eldest attains a *perezhivanie* of his *perezhivaniia*: a form of higher awareness of the situation, a detachment from the environment, which allows him to no longer be stuck or trapped (*englué*) in himself, without knowing what to do, but to act, to be truly active. His development is nonetheless very troubling, Vygotsky tells us; this child is a very particular type—he is without doubt no longer entirely a child that has normal interests and attitudes. He “grew up” very quickly, as is sometimes said; he in any case became “the senior member of the family” (1995: 341) occupying more or less the role of a mother for his brothers, and a mother for his mother. In this sense, the particular *perezhivanie* of this ten/eleven year old child is a complex, cognitive and emotional affective experience that gradually yet radically took him from childhood to another age.³¹

³⁰ It should be noted that if we respond to hate with nobility (a rational affect for Spinoza), then it is a form of benevolence that does not arise from pity (for pity is sadness, and therefore a passionate affect).

³¹ Of course here we do not mean a biological but a psychological age. A genuine psycho-affective transformation (in the sense of a change of nature, and therefore a form of slow but total destruction of self) is taking place in this child’s *perezhivanie*: thus, a broken line of psychological transformation is superimposed on the continuous line of biological development, as is seen when Vygotsky says in passing: “As a result of this, the entire course of his development underwent a striking change. This was not a lively child with normal, lively, simple interests, appropriate to his age and exhibiting a lively level of activity. It was a child whose course of normal development was severely disrupted, a different type of child” (1995: 341).

Conclusion

We can draw several conclusions concerning the relation between consciousness and affectivity from analyzing the Vygotskian *perezhivanie* through the Spinozist conceptuality of affective life.

1. First, we shall affirm that *perezhivanie* is as determined as it is determining, as constituted as it is constitutive: it expresses on the one hand the force of a social situation in a singular individuality, but on the other hand it is itself a (harmful or beneficial) force that structures the subsequent behavior of the individual. A *perezhivanie*, in general, can be a momentary, passing, or lasting, permanent affect [...] so long as a new *perezhivanie* does not come to break it, or rather provide it with a new direction. For let us not forget that the Vygotskian *perezhivanie*, like the Spinozist affect, cannot be reduced to the simple expression of a social environment in a psychological individuality: the *perezhivanie* is not only the manner in which the environment modifies individuality, but the manner in which the environment is modified in individuality, and by this individuality. The affected individual is always at least the partial cause of its own affects, even of those that descend upon it (*s'abattent*), even those that make it highly passive. There is always a minimum of living activity in the manner in which an individual is affected by the weight of the social environment [bearing down] on it. It is in this sense that the causality that goes from the social to the individual, or the inter-psychological to the intra-psychological, is never purely linear, but must be understood beneath the figure of reciprocal causality, or recursive causality: the effect (the individual) takes part in the manner in which the cause (the social world) is reflected in it; the effect determines the manner (the *perezhivanie*, the affect) in which the cause is expressed in it.³²

2. This is why the “social” is as important as the “oneself” in the characterization of consciousness as a “social contact with oneself” (Vygotsky 1997b: 78). For consciousness, defined as a doubling of the *perezhivanie*, as a reflexivity of the affect, is both the expression of a “precisely determined” (as Spinoza would say) or “situated” (as Vygotsky would say) social environment, and of a psychological individuality that is certainly determined, but that is also determining. One might say that consciousness is both that which structures the *perezhivanie* and that which is structured by it. At several points in “The Problem of the Environment”

³² See also what Yves Clot says about mental vitality, which “can only be explained by rejecting any mechanical causality. The dynamic base of vitality is modified in the course of its development, for the cause and the consequence also change place. The history of the subject and of its body is that of the effect that becomes the cause, the cause changed by the effect. This is why the emotions have a future [*ont de l'avenir*]. And it is for this very reason that one must advance, in place of mechanistic causal explanations, what Vygotsky calls ‘historical explanations’” (Clot 2003: 34).

Vygotsky shows that the influence of an environment on a child's development depends on its understanding of this environment, on how it interprets it, on its "degree of awareness" of the situation in question: the child's cognitive power is thus determinant in the production of the *perezhivanie* experienced towards the lived situation.³³ We have seen that there is no affect without a certain idea of the things towards which this affect is experienced; and since there is no idea without the idea of the idea (every idea of an object being also a consciousness of something), there is no affect without consciousness, that is, without an evaluation of the object to which an affective experience refers. In this sense, every *perezhivanie*, be it simple or complex (be it *perezhivanie* of situations or *perezhivanie* of *perezhivaniia*), is produced by a certain degree of awareness (*conscience*) of the lived situation: it is in itself the conscious, albeit partial, idea of the idea of the social world. For Vygotsky, understanding and awareness structure the affective experience of a situation: *perezhivanie* is dependent on them. It therefore not only has an emotional dimension; it also has a cognitive, and even sometimes—and let us not be afraid to use the word—an intellectual one. This is because with Vygotsky, as with Spinoza, there is no incompatibility between intellect and affectivity, between the understanding (*comprehension*) of a situation and the emotion experienced towards it. On the contrary, for an emotion to refer to a situation—for it to be the affect or *perezhivanie* of a determined environment—a certain degree of consciousness or awareness, and therefore of understanding (*intelligence*), of the situation is necessary.

But the child's *perezhivanie* does not only depend on the child's understanding (*intelligence*) or awareness; *perezhivanie* is also that which is produced through producing, potentially, a new form of consciousness of things. The *perezhivanie* may indeed increase and expand, reflect—and not remain enclosed within itself, within its poor degree of confused awareness or consciousness: from the horror experienced at the violence of a mother to the total and complete understanding (*intelligence*) of the constitutive situation of benevolence for one's closest relatives, there is the transition or passage from a consciousness absorbed in the wonder at an evil to a consciousness taking its own affects as its object, comprehending and understanding them, and thereby being able to act and address the situation.³⁴ There is the transition or passage from a simple

³³ "...whatever the situation, its influence depends not only on the nature of the situation itself, but also on the extent of the child's understanding and awareness of the situation" (Vygotsky 1995: 343).

³⁴ The different degrees of awareness of the situation between the children are formulated as follows: "One of them experienced it as an *inexplicable, incomprehensible* horror which has left him in a state of defenselessness. The second was experiencing it *consciously*, as a clash between his strong attachment, and his strong feeling of fear, hate and hostility. And the third child experienced it, *to some extent, as far as it is possible for a*

perezhivanie, suspended in stupefaction or in fluctuation—a passive consciousness or awareness, a very poor, indeed almost no understanding of self and of the world—to a *perezhivanie* of one’s *perezhivaniia*—an active consciousness or awareness, a clear and distinct understanding of one’s power of acting in the world. In “Consciousness as a Problem for the Psychology of Behavior,” where consciousness is defined as *perezhivanie* of *perezhivaniia*, Vygotsky essentially speaks of this higher form of consciousness, that which accompanies activity, that which, through an *affect*, not only has as its object a social situation that it evaluates, but has as its object its very *affects* towards this situation, in order to modify or change into something new, something different. Consciousness understood as *perezhivanie* of *perezhivaniia* is therefore distinctive in that it has as its object not any experienced situation, but the experience of the situation itself: an experience that, through this conscious realization (*prise de conscience*), is reorganized, re-ordered, in such a way that it is no longer endured passively, but becomes a resource from which to act, and to change the situation. The experience of experiences is a consciousness of consciousnesses, a reflected consciousness of reflexive consciousnesses—a consciousness that becomes adequate from experiences that were first experienced in a confused way: lived experience (*perezhivanie*) becomes fully and completely living experience (*perezhivanie* of *perezhivaniia*).³⁵

3. In this article we have insisted on the links between consciousness and affectivity (*perezhivanie*)—and as a result we have not elaborated on the question of the co-belonging (*co-appartenance*) between the consciousness and the word—an idea for which Vygotskian psychology is in fact better known. We certainly did not seek to deny the role of sign mediation in the constitution of individual consciousness: if consciousness is for Vygotsky social by nature, it is so in particular by virtue of its linguistic, or rather its sociolinguistic, nature. However, we think it essential

10–11 year old boy, as a misfortune which has befallen the family and which required him to put all other things aside, to try somehow to mitigate the misfortune and to help both the sick mother and the children” (Vygotsky 1995: 341; own emphasis added).

³⁵ We will not develop here the Vygotskian idea of *perezhivanie* as a “unit” of consciousness (“unit” [*edinica*], and not “unity” of a complex whole [*edinstvo*], according to the distinction made in the first chapter of *Thinking and Speech*). At the end of his article, Veresov goes back over this characterization of *perezhivanie* as *edinica*, and studies the consequences of this (2014: 229–33). In a forthcoming work we will show in what sense the Vygotskian “unit” echoes the Spinozist “common property.” Let us simply remember here that this “unit” is not an element with different properties to the whole (*le tout*) of which it is a part; on the contrary, it has the same characteristics as the whole (*l’ensemble*) to which it belongs. That is to say that every *perezhivanie*, insofar as it is a “unit” of the consciousness, envelops in itself a certain degree of consciousness; but it is as a *perezhivanie* of *perezhivaniia*, as an active affect, that this consciousness becomes full and whole.

here to consider one of the observations outlined at the very end of *Thinking and Speech*, which remains insufficiently explored in studies of Vygotskian psychology—and which at the same time undoubtedly echoes Spinozist thought—namely, the affective core of conscious thought: “We must now take the final step in the analysis of the internal planes of verbal thinking. Thought is not the last of these planes. It is not born of other thoughts. Thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness, a sphere that includes our inclinations and needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotion. The affective and volitional tendency stands behind thought. Only here do we find the answer to the final ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking. We have compared thought to a hovering cloud that gushes a shower of words. To extend this analogy, we must compare the motivation of thought to the wind that puts the cloud in motion” (Vygotsky 1987: 282).

4. To finish, we shall recall a final point that Vygotsky insists on in order to explain this social nature of consciousness, and which, reciprocally, allows us to shed new light on the Spinozist doctrine: namely that *reflexivity*, a characteristic of consciousness, must be understood on the basis of *reversibility*, a characteristic of a certain type of reflex (or of a corporal affection, in Spinozist terms). Vygotsky illustrates this idea through the dynamics of speech that usually become more and more conscious in children as words are returned to those who uttered them in the first instance.

Now, if this speech, in the case of deaf mutes for example, does not develop, if it “gets stuck at the stage of the reflex cry,” it is “not because their speech centers are damaged but because the possibility of the reversibility of the speech reflex is paralyzed by the absence of hearing. Speech does not return as a reflex to the speaker himself. That is why it is unconscious and nonsocial” (Vygotsky 1997b: 78).³⁶ Consequently, the issue facing the education of disabled people, in order that their disability does not worsen and turn into a social handicap, is to find the means to revive the disrupted reversibility of reflexes. And the same no doubt applies to the case of the youngest of the three siblings, that is, when the handicap (stuttering or stammering, even the inability to speak) does not have a physiological cause, but an affective one.

³⁶ As Jean-Paul Bronckart and Friedrich Janette (2010) suggest, this extract should be compared with the very end of *Thinking and Speech*, where Vygotsky asserts both the social being of the word in consciousness and the co-belonging of the word and consciousness. Indeed, the word is the social element of the consciousness (“In consciousness, the word is what—in Feuerbach’s words—is absolutely impossible for one person but possible for two. This word is the most direct manifestation of the historical nature of human consciousness” [Vygotsky 1987: 285]); and, at the same time, the entire consciousness is reflected in the word (it “is reflected in the word like the sun is reflected in a droplet of water” [1987: 285]).

This is the condition on which consciousness of self and of others, and therefore a certain mastery of one's own behavior, can be developed. And such a view, that could be called ethical, or ethico-social, can be found in Spinoza with the idea of a proportionality between the amplitude of the consciousness of the mind and the amplitude of the affective aptitude in the body. Indeed, a high consciousness of self, God and things—which the end of *Ethics* emphasizes—depends on the high activity of the body, which Spinoza tells us depends on the force of its *reversible* aptitude to affect and be affected: being susceptible to being highly affected at once is indeed not, for Spinoza, to be extremely passive (passivity is, on the contrary, a reduction of or an enclosing in self of the affective sensibility); the more a body is able to be affected by several affections at the same time, the more it can become active, and the more it is able to affect—to affect other bodies, but also to affect itself in this reversibility of the affected and the affecting.

An active body is a body that is capable of a high reversibility in its affective aptitude, of a high capacity to have affections that are at once caused and causing, or indeed reflexes that are at once stimulated and stimulating, as Vygotsky would say. Through these reversible reflexes, the body is simultaneously affected and affecting, and even self-affected or self-affecting—this reversibility of the corporal reflex being, from a psychological point of view, the reflexivity of the consciousness—a living consciousness of a body existing in actuality, affected and affecting.

Vygotsky and Spinoza, each in their own way but in converging directions, thus show us the path towards a developing *cogito*, an increasingly powerful *cogito*: that of a consciousness individualized in and by the social, the higher, singular form of the power of the common, being a reflexive idea of a reversible body, of an affective body able to self-affect as soon as it is highly able to be affected and affecting.

Translated from the French by Philippe Le Goff

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