

Concrete Psychology and the Activity Clinic Approach: Implications for Interventionist Research in the XXIst Century

L. Kloetzer

Institute of Psychology and Education, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland,
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6703-8562>, e-mail: laure.kloetzer@unine.ch

This paper discusses the project of concrete psychology, anchored in vital human drama, both for Vygotsky and Politzer, and its methodological implications, especially from within an interventionist, developmental, transformative perspective. How are the concepts of concrete psychology and drama related for Politzer and Vygotsky? How can we push the agenda of concrete psychology forward? What are the methodological implications of a Vygotskian concrete psychology for us today? After discussing both Vygotsky's and Politzer's views on concrete human psychology, we will introduce the French tradition of Activity Clinic, and argue that this approach, and its "organized frameworks," offers the potential to move one step forward in the direction of a concrete human psychology. We will analyze a short sequence of Cross Self Confrontation as a dramatic interaction potentially contributing to development. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of concrete psychology for XXIth century researchers. The paper thus aims at contributing to an urgent need to rethink an epistemology of psychology, which strongly anchors research in practice.

Keywords: activity clinic, concrete psychology, development, drama, methodology, cross self-confrontation.

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Introduction

Vygotsky's writing has increasingly inspired psychology worldwide, ever since the partial translation of his writing into English, beginning in the 1960's. This worldwide reception provided an important impulse to further developments of the theory, methodology and practice of psychology and education in the long term, all the more as the understanding of this rich heritage outside Russia varied considerably. On the one hand, it was deeply influenced by the availability of texts and translation issues, as we clearly know now. The reader will unfortunately share some of our difficulties here, which will be reflected in our use of footnotes to keep the original French texts or present the French translations (from Russian) which we have to translate into English (instead of relying on the English translations, which might be weaker). On the other hand, it was received under specific local scientific, social and historical conditions. In this regards, the main reception of Vygotsky in France (or to be more precise, in the French-speaking countries in Europe, especially France and the French-speaking part of Switzerland) happened late, with the first publication in French in 1985 of Vygotsky's masterpiece *Thought and Language* (in French, *Pensée et lan-*

gage, « langage » meaning both speech and language as in Russian) at the *Editions Sociales* (the official publisher of the Communist Party in France). *Pensée et langage* was translated by Françoise Sève, a meticulous and highly qualified translator, with the help of her husband, Lucien Sève, a well-known Marxist philosopher, who was also director of the Editions Sociales at that time. The French version was published with the original commentary by Piaget in French on the criticisms of Vygotsky regarding his own work (Piaget, 1962). Indeed, in all countries, the way in which Vygotsky was received depended on the local context of research on psychology and education. In France, the understanding of Piaget and other prominent French psychologists (including Wallon) strongly influenced the reception of Vygotsky. This story remains to be fully analyzed and reflected upon. Today, we would like to focus on two interesting aspects of the developments of Vygotsky's work in France. The publication of Vygotsky's Notebooks sheds new light on the interest of Vygotsky for Politzer's concrete psychology. We will discuss this in the first part of the paper. In the second part, we will briefly introduce the Activity Clinic, which for the unfamiliar reader is an interventionist approach in work psychology deeply inspired by the work of Vygotsky, and argue that its "organized frameworks" [1]

contribute to a concrete psychology approach. In the final part of the paper, we will show how some of Vygotsky's core ideas inspire a renewed way of conducting research in psychology. This paper contributes to an urgent need to rethink an epistemology of psychology, which strongly anchors research in practice.

1. Vygotsky and Politzer on Drama and Concrete Psychology

In his fragmented notes on historical psychology, or concrete human psychology, Vygotsky (1929, first published in French in 2004) discusses the development of higher psychological functions as the famous principle of sociogenesis, and calls for a "sociogenetic" method for studying this development, that is still to be fully developed, following for example Veresov's suggestions [2,3]. This important text was first published in English in 1986, and in French in 2004, in a first translation by Olga Anokhina and Michel Brossard [4]. It has been recently republished with a revised translation as an annex to the French edition of the History of Development of Higher Psychological Functions [5].

In this extremely dense although elliptic text, Vygotsky recapitulates some of his most famous theses, stating how these higher psychological functions are constructed through a process of social interaction and regulated by the human being through the use "for himself" (*pour soi*) of signs which were first used in social interactions, to act upon the others. He concludes: "the individual for human beings is not the contrary of the social, but its superior form"¹ [4, our translation, p.236 in the French translation]. The "machine" model of the human brain, operating self-regulation of human behaviour to which Vygotsky has dedicated some of his major works is therefore considered to be the "social personality of the human being, i.e. conceived as a member of a social group. Conceived as a social being. As a being per se – for the others and for herself"² (ibidem, p. 242). Constructivism, conceived as the potential for human beings to construct themselves through the interiorization of social interactions into the building and hierarchy of higher psychological functions, which leads to their individual personality, is therefore the key mechanism explaining human development. In this context, Vygotsky introduced the concept of drama as the dynamic of a given individual: "the drama is woven with inner struggles"³ (ibidem, p. 245), and concludes: "my history of cultural development is the abstract development of a concrete psychology"⁴ (ibidem, p. 246).

The drama here is the conflict of the hierarchy of higher psychological functions, related to different social roles, in different social contexts. This concept of drama, for Vygotsky, is strongly related to Politzer's understanding of drama and concrete human psychology: "I want only to say that without the human being (the operator) as a whole, we can not explain the operation of the device (the brain); this is the human being who controls the brain, not the brain that controls the human being; without the person, we can not understand the person's behaviour, and psychology must be understood not in terms of process but in terms of drama"⁵ (ibidem, p. 249). Vygotsky therefore connects the concept of drama, as internal conflict of social roles, and the concept of drama, as vital and meaningful experience of a human being, by the mediation of the construction and interplay of higher psychological functions and *perezhivanie*. In concrete psychology, relations between psychological functions are specific to a human being, emotionally situated in a historico-cultural, social environment. Following Politzer, Vygotsky grounds the perspective of a concrete psychology within drama, which would be the only scientific psychology relevant to the human beings, going beyond the scientific study of other animals who would only be able to deal with basic evolutionary functions. On a methodological plane, Vygotsky's claims for a concrete and constructionist psychology urge us to follow research principles which are grounded in a sociogenetic and ecological experimentation.

In Vygotsky's Notebooks [6], we find two explicit mentions of the work of Politzer. On page 140 (notes written around October 1930), discussing psychological systems, Vygotsky quotes Politzer "it is not the muscle that works, but the person." Vygotsky writes that "a function is an organ in action" and introduces "consciousness and its owner" as the agent of human thinking: "hence, about all psychological activity we can say that it is a function of the brain. But that is a metapsychological designation. The intrapsychological designation must be another one. Which? The system is the basic concept of psychological analysis. Memorizing always fulfils some function in something more complex and changes when it is a part of different wholes. The eternal problem: *Ich denke* or *Es denkt*. Who is thinking? Consciousness and its owner." On page 368, Vygotsky writes "psychologie concrète" (in French) when he discusses psychology as a science: "NB! On the definition of psychology as the science of mental life. 1. Life not in a biological sense, but in the sense of a biography, a life description. After all, it is not breathing and blood circulation that form the topic of a biography, of one's existence, of a drama, of a novel, but the events of a human life, i.e. the

¹ In the French translation: "L'individuel chez l'homme n'est pas le contraire du social, mais sa forme supérieure" (Vygotsky, 1929/2004, p. 236).

² In the French translation: "C'est la personnalité sociale de l'homme. De l'homme comme membre d'un groupe social déterminé. Conçu comme un être social. Comme un être en soi – pour les autres et pour soi" (ibidem, p. 242).

³ In the French translation: "Le drame est tissé de luttes intérieures" (ibidem, p. 245).

⁴ In the French translation: "Mon histoire du développement culturel est le développement abstrait d'une psychologie concrète" (ibidem, p. 246).

⁵ In the French translation: "Je veux seulement dire ceci: sans l'homme (l'opératrice), pris sans sa totalité, on ne peut pas expliquer le fonctionnement de son appareil (le cerveau), que c'est l'homme qui commande le cerveau et non le cerveau qui commande l'homme, que sans l'homme on ne peut pas comprendre son comportement, qu'il ne faut pas appréhender la psychologie en termes de processus mais en termes de drame" (ibidem, p. 249).

problem of the *psychologie concrète* comes first.” We may find another echo of Politzer’s work later in the same note when Vygotsky writes that “the phenomenon of mental life and the psychological fact are synonyms.”

For Georges Politzer [7], the concepts of drama and concrete psychology jointly define a renewed perspective on psychological research. He strongly criticizes the state of psychology in the 1920s, which he calls a “fog pod” or “lost science,” in which psychologists gave up the understanding of the human psychic life for the safety of measurements. His criticisms of standard psychology remain relevant for some parts of modern psychology:

“As their scientific needs are satisfied by the use of scientific appliances, and by the finding of some statistics which usually do not survive their publication, they claim that science requires patience and reject any control or criticism as being metaphysics, which has nothing to do with science.” (p. 2).

Although they are insufficient in his eyes, he credits Gestalt psychology with an attempt to keep the whole experience of the person, instead of cutting in into insignificant and static elements; behaviourism for suggesting a strong definition of a psychological fact with the concept of behaviour; and psychoanalysis as paving the way to a new, lively, and revolutionary psychology. Psychoanalysis rejects abstraction, understood as detachment of the psychological facts from the concrete life of real, singular subjects and their understanding as the product of impersonal processes:

“Abstraction eliminates the subject and assimilates psychological facts to objective facts, i.e. to 3rd person facts⁶” (p°38, our translation).

Commenting Freud on dreams, he appreciates the method:

“what characterizes, on the contrary, the way Freud brings up the topic of dream, is that he doesn’t accomplish abstraction. He doesn’t want to detach the dream from the subject who dreams it; he doesn’t conceive it as a 3rd person state, he doesn’t situate it in *a voice without a subject*. It is by binding it to the subject whose dream it is that he gives it its status of psychological fact⁷.” (p°39, our translation and emphasis).

Politzer defines the human drama as the sole “psychological fact” and therefore object of a concrete psychology: “the point of view of the psychologist is that which corresponds to drama⁸” (p. 248, our translation). In other words:

“The drama concerns the human being in its entirety, and considered as the centre of numerous events, which, precisely because they imply a first person, have some meaning. The meaning related to a first person distinguishes the psychological fact from all natural facts. In short, the originality of the psychological fact is given by the existence of a properly human plane of existence and by the dramatic life of an individual happening there⁹” (ibidem, p. 250).

On a methodological level, the focus on the psychological facts, i.e the drama, requires a double level of psychological inquiry:

“the psychological fact is not the simple behaviour, but precisely the human behaviour, i.e. the behaviour related to both the events in which the human life is taking place, and the individual human being, as subject of this life. In short, the psychological fact is the behaviour which has a human meaning. However, to understand this meaning, we need data given by the subject and which come to us through narration: the purely motor behaviour becomes a psychological fact only after being enlightened by the narrative¹⁰.” (p. 248–249).

Politzer’s words suggest two implications for psychology as the science of “psychological facts” on a “properly human plane of existence”: (a) drama as a unit of analysis allows us to keep “the human being in its entirety”; (b) a third-person point of view is deeply insufficient to understand the psychological fact, as the psychological fact is defined by the meaning that the human subject gives it. Therefore, Politzer urges us to analyse “the psychological fact” as being indissociably constituted by the act and its first-person meaning, which we can access only through the subject’s narration. In our view, this double request for the scientific study of the truly human mental life remains an ongoing concern.

2. Activity Clinic: developmental intervention and research in work psychology

How can we push the agenda of concrete psychology forward? In this section, we argue that the Activity Clinic approach, developed at the Cnam (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers) in France since the 1980’s by Prof. Yves Clot and colleagues, offers the potential to move one step forward in the direction of a truly concrete human psychology. In France, the reception of Vy-

⁶ Original in French: “L’abstraction élimine le sujet et assimile les faits psychologiques aux faits objectifs, c’est-à-dire aux faits en 3^{ème} personne”. (p°38).

⁷ Original in French: “Ce qui caractérise, au contraire, la manière dont Freud aborde le problème du rêve, c’est qu’il n’accomplit pas l’abstraction. Il ne veut pas détacher le rêve du sujet qui le rêve; il ne veut pas le concevoir comme un état en troisième personne, il ne veut pas le situer dans un vide sans sujet. C’est en le rattachant au sujet dont il est le rêve qu’il veut lui rendre son caractère de fait psychologique.” (p°39).

⁸ Original in French: “Le point de vue du psychologue est celui qui coïncide avec le drame” (Politzer, 1928/2003, p. 248).

⁹ Original in French: “Le drame implique l’homme pris dans sa totalité et considéré comme le centre d’un certain nombre d’événements qui, précisément parce qu’ils se rapportent à une première personne, ont un sens. C’est le sens rapporté à une première personne qui distingue radicalement le fait psychologique de tous les faits de la nature. Bref, l’originalité du fait psychologique est donnée par l’existence même d’un plan proprement humain et de la vie dramatique de l’individu qui s’y déroule” (ibidem, p. 250).

¹⁰ Original in French: “Le fait psychologique n’est pas le comportement simple, mais précisément le comportement humain, c’est-à-dire le comportement en tant qu’il se rapporte, d’une part, aux événements au milieu desquels se déroule la vie humaine, et d’autre part, à l’individu, en tant qu’il est sujet de cette vie. Bref, le fait psychologique c’est le comportement qui a un sens humain. Seulement, pour constituer ce sens, on a besoin de données qui nous sont fournies par le sujet et qui nous parviennent par l’intermédiaire du récit: le comportement simplement moteur ne devient donc fait psychologique qu’après avoir été éclairé par le récit” (ibidem, p. 248–249).

gotsky was very fertile not only in the field of education but also in the field of work psychology. This may be due to the pre-existing strength in France of traditions of interventions and research in work milieux, conducted by both researchers engaged in the analysis and transformation of social practice in ergonomics and work psychology. The French social history of social transformation, which combines the efforts of workers, trade unions, and researchers, in the critical analysis of work situations, is the socio-historical context which supports this reception into the field of Work Psychology. The scientific context is also favourable. From the perspective of ergonomics, the notion of *activity*, which is at the core of the French-speaking ergonomics tradition of analysis and transformation of real work situations, could easily accommodate Leontiev's works on the dynamic hierarchical model of activity. The Cnam in Paris (with, in particular, Alain Wisner and Jacques Leplat) has played a prominent role in the reception of first Leontiev and then Vygotsky's works in this field. In this context, Vygotsky's works appeared to Wisner, as the theoretical foundation in psychology through which anthropotechnology could overcome some of the challenges experienced in the practice of technology transfers [8]. The remarkable reading of Vygotsky by Wisner testifies to his deep and early (compared to other researchers in France at least) knowledge of his work through the English translations. Vygotsky in France has therefore been received in the field of work psychology as a theoretician of practice, contributing to an epistemology of practice, which might help overcome some of its issues.

Activity Clinic builds on some of Vygotsky's core proposals: first of all, the tight relations between practice and theory. From its beginnings, the Activity Clinic approach has been dealing with both practice, in the form of developmental transformations in the work milieux, and research. This double temporality of Activity Clinic, articulating the time of action (and reflection on ongoing transformative action), called intervention, and the time of research, primarily defined as research on interventions and development through interventions, is an important defining character of this approach. Clot calls it "fundamental field research" ("recherche fondamentale de terrain", in French) [9] to overcome the unfortunate and well spread dichotomy between fundamental research, which deals with theoretical development, and applied research, which deals with the development of practice. Clot directly quotes Vygotsky, writing that "development is both an object and the method of psychology" [9]:

"On the research plane, from a Vygotskian point of view, development is simultaneously object and method. Development, its dead ends, conflicts, bifurcations, stops, unexpected resumptions, fundamental incompleteness, cannot be studied 'in chamber.' Taking care in the field of development without 'second thoughts' of research is therefore precious, to multiply and test the potentialities, push the real to its limits, look for the limits of action to roll them back. Our joint work with our interlocutors in the field allows to enrich the range of possibilities of human action, to discover what was impossible to imagine before. Here, development is a method for the production of practical findings which were unthinkable so far. Consequently, development, triggered that way, can be studied. Here, the status of the action in the field changes, to become a means for another action, the research itself. Its object is what has happened, that can be understood only from the point of view of another action: the production of knowledge on development" [5] (Clot, 2008, p. 69)¹¹.

The author also writes later:

"Doing research in Activity Clinic is coming back on the action that has been produced to study the mechanisms supporting its development or limiting this action. (...) With Vygotsky, we can claim that it is in movement that the body shows what it really is."¹² (ibidem, p. 71).

Following Vygotsky [10], practice is seen as the cornerstone of theoretical engagement and development, and theory is simultaneously critical for the further development of practice.

Practice and theory are unified by a shared focus on development: development is the goal of the intervention, as well as an object of research. Therefore, the second core inspiration from Vygotsky is this focus, of the intervention as well as of the scientific activity, on the issue of *development*. From within this perspective, human development is understood in a Vygotskian sense as a process which is historically rooted, socially shared and culturally shaped. This of course requires a delicate expansion of the developmental psychology of Vygotsky, who mainly studied the development of children, to the lifelong development of adults. This point would deserve another paper. For the time being, let us highlight some of Vygotsky's points regarding the development of the child which are absolutely relevant to the development of humans in general, whatever their age: the source of development lies in the interactions of the subject with her environment, which are actively refracted through

¹¹ Original French version: "Sur le plan de la recherche, d'un point de vue vygotkien, le développement est donc à la fois objet et méthode. On ne peut pas étudier "en chambre" le développement, ses impasses, ses conflits, ses bifurcations, ses arrêts, ses reprises inattendues, son inachèvement foncier. S'occuper sur le terrain du développement sans "arrière-pensée" de recherche est donc précieux pour multiplier et tester les possibles, pousser le réel dans ses retranchements, finalement chercher les limites de l'action pour les faire reculer. Le travail conjoint avec nos interlocuteurs sur le terrain permet d'enrichir la gamme des possibilités de l'action humaine, de découvrir ce qui, jusqu'ici, était inimaginable. Là, le développement est méthode de production de résultats pratiques éventuellement impensables jusque-là. Du coup, ainsi provoqué, on peut l'étudier. Mais là, l'action de terrain change de statut pour devenir moyen d'une autre action, la recherche elle-même. Son objet est ce qui s'est passé et qu'on ne peut saisir que du point de vue d'une autre action: la production de connaissances sur le développement" (Clot, 2008, p. 69).

¹² Original French version: "Faire de la recherche en clinique de l'activité, c'est revenir sur l'action produite pour étudier les mécanismes de développement ou d'empêchement de cette action. (...) Mais avec Vygotski, on peut soutenir que c'est en mouvement que le corps montre ce qu'il est réellement". (ibidem, p. 71).

the *perezhivanie* of the subject [11]. Of course, the nature of these interactions and subjective refractions vary greatly according to the age and kind of institutional milieu with which the subjects engage, and a school-age child will not have the same social situation of development than a worker in a given professional setting. The sociogenesis of psychological higher functions is visible in professional milieu: ways of reasoning, talking, moving, acting in working environments are learnt first in social relations before becoming personal skills. The distinction between spontaneous, or everyday, concepts and scientific concepts is also relevant to analyse the development of professional concepts. Of course, detailed analyses of the dynamic interrelation of these concepts in the workplace are needed [see for example 12; 13].

Activity Clinic also extends Vygotsky's writings with the works of Spinoza and Bakhtin. Based, among others, on the French ergonomics tradition introduced earlier and on Spinoza's ethics, Activity Clinic frames development as the development of the subject's power to act [14]. Development is seen as a potentiality to act, to expand one's range of action, or to be more precise, of activity.

In multiple texts, Clot quotes this sentence by Vygotsky:

"Behaviour, as it is achieved, is a tiny fraction of what is possible. Man is full of unrealized possibilities every minute"¹³ [15, p. 76].

Or this one:

"Behaviour is a system of victorious reactions ... at every moment, the individual is full of unrealized possibilities" [10, p. 266–267].

Based on these "unrealized possibilities," Clot conceptualises activity, i.e. human psychological activity, as exceeding the observable actions of the subjects: it also includes invisible psychological dimensions. Work activity is seen as a compromise: between what is required of the workers and what they think they should do in the situation, between the meaning and the effectiveness of the action, and between what has to be done and what else could be done [14]. Human action is the result of subjective arbitration between several possible actions. These tensions, these compromises, these unrealized possibilities play a role in the realized activity of the subject. What is actually realized, but also what could have been, could be, or will be realized is present in the worker's subjective activity. Clot distinguishes between, on one hand *the realized activity*, which is what the worker does that can be observed, and, on the other hand, *the real of activity*, which refers to these unrealized possibilities: what workers don't do but would like to do, what they aim to do without succeeding, what they abandon doing, what they think they would do under different conditions, or even what they do to avoid doing what is expected of them... The real of activity is full of unresolved conflicts, which are entry points for development dynamics [16; 14].

With this psychological depth, Clot [16] conceptualizes the psychological activity of the human subject as being both directed towards the objects of the world, towards the relation of Others to this object, and to the Subject him/herself – wherein development of the subject may result from development of any of its parts. The development of the power to act of the subject is therefore possibly a development of one's power to act upon oneself, upon others and/or upon the world.

In our analyses, these dimensions are linked. A development of the activity of the subject on one of these poles frequently triggers development of their activity on other poles [17], which can be schematized in the diagram below (the subject is the vertex S in the schema, the object of the activity is vertex O and the others to whom this activity is addressed are vertex A). These relations are mediated by technical and psychological tools, including the work tools, procedures, and collaboration rules.

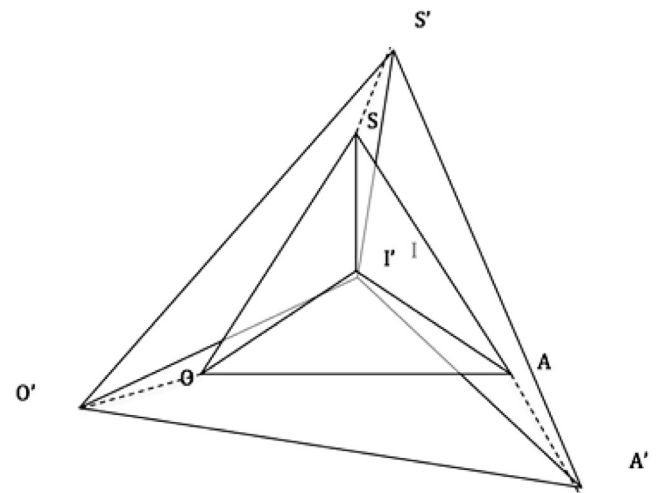


Fig. 1. Development of human activity

This psychological activity, with its internal conflicts, is both a useful concept and a unit of analysis for looking at the work activity in the field. It is a "water drop," which presents all characteristics of the whole work activity in a smaller form, thereby enabling scientific abstraction while keeping the properties of the whole phenomenon under study [18, p. 500].

The psychological activity takes place within the larger collective work activity, and in this context, can be analysed at four levels [14]: the personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and impersonal dimensions of the activity. The personal dimension is the subjective engagement of each worker in their job, with their skills, knowledge, life history, professional experience, preferences, values, moods, expectations, worries, goals, hopes, and desires. The interpersonal dimension refers to collaboration at work, to the multiple participants in work activity, past, present and future colleagues, peers, managers, customers, mentors, and

¹³ In the French translation: "Le comportement tel qu'il s'est réalisé est une infime part de ce qui est possible. L'homme est plein à chaque minute de possibilités non réalisées" (Vygotsky, 1924/2003, p. 76).

experts — all potential addressees of the professional action. All this happens in a professional milieu which has a history. The collective memory of the place, providing each worker with resources for present action and anticipation of the future, is called the professional genre [14] that is, the usual ways of acting and interacting, speaking, doing, relating to people and things in a professional way that are established in a specific work environment. Such a historical heritage functions both as a collective constraint on, and a collective resource for, individual action. It contributes to the *transpersonal* dimension. The transpersonal dimension is a binding characteristic across generations and individuals, always at risk of disappearing if it is not reconstructed in the course of personal and interpersonal activities. Finally, the *impersonal* dimension appears through the diverse elements of the official work organization: social laws organizing work, collective conventions, job profiles, definition of tasks, procedures and operating rules, evaluation standards, performance indicators, professional training, and division of labour... The impersonal dimension of the trade plays an extremely important psychological role, allowing each individual to structure and assess what they are doing, to collaborate, and to imagine what they could become and do in the future.

One last key inspiration from Vygotsky for the Activity Clinic approach has been the importance of methodological creativity and *indirect methodologies to support development* [19]. Activity Clinic is widely known for its structured use of Cross Self-Confrontations, a methodology initially created to help the researchers and the participants understand the work activity by supporting collective reflection on video images among a group of workers [20]. This methodology has been explained in details in different publications in English [17; 21; 22]. It is complex, with a double track and 3-step process. The first track is focused on conducting a co-analysis of the work activities with a group of volunteers. This detailed analysis of actual work activities is conducted with volunteer subjects, who constitute the associated research group. On the second track, this detailed co-analysis triggers and frames the discussions between managers, workers, researchers, and experts in the steering committee formed for the intervention. The co-analysis with workers becomes an instrument to act upon the work organization and transform the conditions of the dialogue within the company.

In Cross Self Confrontation, the observations, video-recordings and work analysis produced are not a focus *per se* of the research, but instead a mediation, useful insofar as it enables workers to view their activity differently, to transform organizational problems into new resources for development, and to renew the links among the different architectural dimensions of their collective activity (personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and impersonal dimensions).

In the following section, we will introduce and discuss a short interaction in Cross Self Confrontation happening during an Activity Clinic intervention in relation to drama, as a dramatic interaction which constitutes a potentially developmental event. We will then consider implications of concrete psychology for 21st century research.

3. Creating dialogical frameworks for dramatic interactions

In this section, we would now like to discuss Cross Self Confrontations in relation to drama (in Vygotsky's and Politzer's term). To do so, we will introduce a very short vignette, presenting a moment in which two nurses (and the researcher) watch and discuss videorecordings of their own activity on a sensitive professional task: the bathing of elderly, dependant patients. This moment of the working day has been previously selected as an interesting moment for the co-analysis by the group of workers participating in the research, and the two nurses have volunteered to begin this co-analysis by a video-recording and discussion in simple then cross self-confrontation. So the researcher has been following the two volunteer nurses in their everyday activities and has been recording, with their full approval as well as the approval of the patient, the sequences in which they perform, individually or in pairs, this intimate duty. These sequences now get watched and discussed by the two nurses. This small excerpt takes place in a long process of intervention in this French Public Health Institution, hosting dependant older people and disabled adults. We have been working with two different units for many months, with the goal of supporting the activity of reflecting collectively on one's practices and changing the modalities of professional dialogue within the units and between the management and the workers. In short, our action aimed at documenting some real situations in details (for example here : the toilet or bathing of the patients), and engaging the workers in a sustained reflection on what they could see themselves and the others do or not do in these situations. This patient work articulating close observation, questioning, and dialogue, may open up the field for personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and impersonal transformations at work.

Short vignette

The videorecording presented in this part of the Cross Self Confrontation is 70 seconds long. One of the nurses participating in the research, let's call her Clara, is visible. She is greeting an old lady lying in her bed, preparing her for the bathroom, which weekly — today — includes washing her hair. Then one of her colleagues enters and says that the bathroom has been booked for another patient, and asks if Clara wants to request a change. However, washing the hair of the patient requires a special treatment, advised by the doctor, which should have been anticipated. Looking closely at the state of the hair of the patient, the two nurses try to analyze whether this treatment has been done or not, and conclude with some disappointment that "it doesn't look like it would be unstuck, nothing is unstuck." They finally decide to give up on the hair wash for today, despite the fact that the patient looks like it would be much needed. Both nurses now act together to continue taking care of her in her bed.

During the Cross Self Confrontation, Clara and another nurse, let's call her Emilie, are watching selected videorecordings of this activity. At this time of the

Cross Self Confrontation, all participants are watching Clara's videorecording, and the researcher gave Emilie the instruction to stop it whenever something strikes her or interests her, to comment on it or ask questions of her colleague. The two nurses have been watching this part of the videorecording seriously, but Emilie doesn't stop it. The researcher stops the videorecording and addresses Emilie, telling her that Clara previously expressed her concern about being sure of what had been done or not with patients, and asks her if it is also a concern for her. The discussion which follows is 2 minutes 30 long. In her first interpretation of the situation, Emilie links this lack of coordination in the treatment of the patient to the shortcomings of collective communications and transmissions within the home, especially uncertain communications with the doctor. However, Clara's explanations show that the problem lies in the work organisation of shifts which are more and more composed of external workers, who by definition can not follow the patient's health and well-being over time. She concludes that "it should be done anyway." At that point in the conversation, both Clara and Emilie look silently at the frozen video, scratching their head. Then they continue looking, commenting on the feasibility of doing the treatment and washing anyway, looking concerned and now playing with their own hair. Clara says, both to herself and to her colleague in the Cross Self Confrontation setting, "if you see the state of her hair ... In addition, I say it aloud!" (this last comment refers to the videorecording, in which she also comments on the state of the patient's hair to her other colleague). The tone of the two similar comments, on the state of the hair, are different: defensive, with some anger, in the work setting; serious, with professional concern, in the Cross Self Confrontation setting. Consequently, Emilie bursts out laughing, commenting: "it is the reality, it is not our fault, Clara!" Both nurses laugh together.

Analysis of this short interaction as drama

The Cross Self Confrontation setting carefully organizes a framework for the joint investigation of the problems, challenges, satisfactions or enigmas of everyday work activity. To do so, it combines detailed observation of the work activity through the use of videorecordings, and a triangular dialogue (first nurse, second nurse, the researcher) in relation to these images. The researcher creates and maintains the rules and functioning of this dialogical and analytical collaborative framework. She also aims at supporting the development of reflection among the workers, by further externalizing some internal reflections of the first nurse, or by encouraging the second nurse to make her own views explicit, allowing the first nurse to contradict them and delve further into the shared understanding of the situation. Soliciting B to help A think is an indirect strategy. This is only one way of doing, a close analysis of other vignettes would show many different actions of the researcher, but with a constant positioning as an instrument for the development of the professional activity of the workers. This critical analysis,

which first happens in the social relations in the Cross Self Confrontation framework with the help of the researcher, can be appropriated by the participants for their own sake. The textual description in the vignette aims at showing something that is obvious in the videorecording of this Cross Self Confrontation interview: the fact that this process of co-analysis triggers both affective and cognitive dimensions. We can describe this short sequence as a dramatic interaction: the real life displeasing event, soon forgotten or denied despite its painful and shameful repetition in the work setting, gets transformed into a different psychological event, with a new status, through its inscription in the socio-material setting of the Cross Self Confrontation. Its potential developmental power depends upon the future history of this new event (the event formed by the original event as recorded on the video and its discussion in the Cross Self Confrontation setting). With the help of the researcher or of other participants, it could be further discussed and finally turned into an instrument for an extended discussion with the management – which has been the case in the intervention, based on the creation of an edited video with different sequences of patients' bathroom times and their comments.

In this sequence, the participants are engaged in a close analysis of their work activities. Their psychological activity is complex, mixing an activity of observation, an activity of dialogue, an activity of analysis. The professional task becomes a significant social and psychological object through various narrations, which get transformed with the variation of social contexts and meanings. The transformation of the social meaning of these professional tasks may then transform its psychological meaning, as well as the transformation of its psychological meaning may transform the social situation. The participants are obviously affected by what they see. Non-verbal as well as verbal behaviour reflect this. However, these emotions may trigger development only through a process of interpersonal discussion and elaboration. The researchers mediate this process through first the creation of a very specific dialogical situation, and secondly their actions to sustain a certain kind of dialogical activity in this specific dialogical framework. Finally, they edit the videorecordings to create short films which can be shared with different audiences (the workers whose activity has been filmed, the group of workers participating in the research, the steering committee of the research with the managers of the place, the colleagues from the two participating units, the funding body of this health institution, etc.) The edited films are re-worked to incorporate the reflections and controversies emerging in the dialogical setting, based on emotional refractions. In so doing, the researchers attempt to simultaneously trigger transformative *perezhivanie* for the workers and decision-makers, by sharing with them both the original images and the thoughts and new meanings elaborated by the workers. The goal is to create a new kind of collective, interprofessional, cross-hierarchical activity in which all participants are engaged in truthful dialogue on real-world work problems.

Conclusion: Implications of Concrete Psychology for Interventionist Research in the 21st Century

Modern psychology can sometimes appear more closely related to Viktor Frankenstein's dream of reconstructing life by sewing cut pieces of flesh and blood, than to Politzer's call to humanize psychology. However, Politzer's proposals draws a minimal line of action for psychologists in order not to be "below the floating line" of a psychology of human beings: considering the person as a whole, as the active subject of his or her history and activity, minimally requires us to study "psychological facts," defined by the inseparable unity of the human act and of its meaning from within a first-person perspective. This requires us at a minimum to take seriously both the human action and its interpretation through narration by the subject (excluding a large part of our experimental colleagues unfortunately). From a Vygotskian perspective, concrete psychology enters into a fully new phase: a developmental phase. The challenges of studying human life and drama in their temporal and social dynamics, i.e.

as they develop through time and engagement in social activities, are even more complex. This requires us not only to carefully observe a single human action and collect its narration by the subject, but to grasp the process of the development of these acts and their meaning. Multiple accounts in time are therefore needed for any chance of understanding development. Vygotsky provides us with a safer way for those who wish to study development scientifically: provoking development, for example by offering new cultural instruments to the child, to help him overcome unsolvable tasks in a collaborative setting [5]. The Activity Clinic approach adopts such an exciting perspective in the field of work psychology and professional development. Creating dialogical or "organized frameworks" [1], we may be able to transform some everyday experiences into new psychological events- into dramatic interactions with some developmental potential. Almost a hundred years later, the Vygotskian form, fully renewed by its developmental dimension, of the Politzer's call for a concrete psychology, is a solid bedrock for an epistemology of a collaborative *psychology for social change* that we deeply need more than ever.

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Конкретная психология и подход «клиники деятельности»: значимость для интервенционных исследований в 21 веке

Л. Клотцер

Институт психологии и образования, Университет Невшателя, Швейцария
ORCID ID:<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6703-8562>, e-mail: laure.kloetzer@unine.ch

В статье обсуждается проект Выготского и Полицера по построению конкретной психологии, основанной на реальной жизни человека, «жизненной драме», и его методологическая значимость, особенно в контексте интервенций, развития и трансформации. Как соотносятся концепции конкретной психологии и драмы для Полицера и Выготского? Каким образом мы могли бы развить идеи конкретной психологии? Какова методологическая значимость конкретной психологии Выготского для современного исследователя? В статье последовательно изложены взгляды и Выготского, и Полицера на конкретную психологию человека, а также представлена французская концепция «клиники деятельности»: мы полагаем, что данный подход с его «организованными рамками» потенциально может продвинуть нас в направлении конкретной психологии человека. Мы приводим анализ небольшого фрагмента кросс-самоконфронтационных интервью как примера потенциально развивающего драматического взаимодействия. В заключительной части статьи приведены размышления касательно значимости конкретной психологии для исследователей 21 века. Настоящая статья ставит своей целью внести вклад в переосмысление эпистемологии психологии, необходимость в котором давно назрела, и иллюстрирует укорененность научного исследования в практике.

Ключевые слова: клиника деятельности, конкретная психология, развитие, драма, методология, кросс-самоконфронтация.

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Information about the authors

Laure Kloetzer, PhD in Psychology, Ass. Professor of Sociocultural Psychology, Institute of Psychology and Education, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6703-8562>, e-mail: laure.kloetzer@unine.ch

Информация об авторах

Лаура Клотцер, PhD, доцент, Институт психологии и образования, Университет Невшателя, Швейцария, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6703-8562>, e-mail: laure.kloetzer@unine.ch

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