

## Anxiety in Action: Sullivan's Interpersonal Psychiatry as a Supplement to Vygotskian Psychology

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Psychiatric issues such as the formation of intimate bonds, personality, anxiety, and antisocial behavior tend to have little place in Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian studies, giving the impression that all humans are competent and cooperative participants in social interaction. Nonetheless, Vygotsky himself was interested in psychiatric issues and contributed to psychiatric practice. Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal psychiatry is compatible with and adds to socio-historical psychology an account of the origins and consequences of anxiety and the anxiety system. Sullivan provided a Vygotsky-like account of a person trying to grow into the social world he or she is born into and trying to satisfy needs with available people, themselves already socialized, enculturated, and formed as selves. Anthony B. Gabriele's little-known practical elaborations of interpersonal psychiatry, further, are consistent with situated micro-analytical approaches to learning within social contexts.

Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian accounts of experience generally consider positive collaborations of competent and cooperative participants. In neo-Vygotskian studies, pathologies or situational failures and misfires are generally found within the organizational arrangements that bring people together, the organization of the activity, the mismatch of participants' orientations toward and understandings of the situation, or the lack of appropriate tools to mediate the activity. This is not the usual realm of psychotherapy or counseling that, despite notable exceptions like family systems and social learning therapies,<sup>1</sup> looks for failures in the individual, whose behavioral, attitudinal, or emotional inappropriacies make the individual less capable of benefitting from situations (though almost all recognize that these inappropriacies have roots in the earliest social experiences in the family). Furthering the distance between the two worlds, Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian approaches to human interaction and development usually consider public participation among non-intimate people of school age and older meeting in educational or work settings. Intimacy between parent and infant have only had limited attention in Vygotskian work, focused on the learning of cultural practice, particularly language, in early childhood. Beyond issues of infant and early

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the social and cultural approaches to clinical psychology that are not overtly in the Sullivan tradition, nonetheless, were recognizably influenced by people within the Sullivan circle such as Erich Fromm, Frieda Fromm Reichmann, Karen Horney, Gregory Bateson, and Edward Sapir or on its fringes, such as Erik Erikson.

childhood development, intimacy appears almost nowhere in the Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian literature. The formation of intimate bonds, personality, anxiety, and unfortunate forms of interaction—the heart of most forms of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy—are just not topics. Thus we get a picture in the Vygotskian world of willing, skilled, active participants, able to collaborate easily with each other as long as they know what they are doing, share a congruent view with others in the situation, and have the necessary tools.

This optimistic view of human interaction is salutary in avoiding blaming people for failures of situation, presenting human growth as always and relatively unproblematically available, and setting no bounds on human cooperation except our limited knowledge and resources. Yet our experience tells us that issues of intimacy in childhood and later are important, that deep characterological habits and commitments interfere with or facilitate successful unfolding of situations, that situations go astray because of untoward behavior of participants, that people's moods affect their orientation and ability to participate in situations, that people often are dissatisfied with or refuse to participate in situations that both they and others would agree are to their benefit, that anxiety is a frequent accompaniment to life, that people often show hesitancy or even resistance to growth, that almost all people show some difficulties in living and cooperating with each other, and many have severe dysfunctions.

Is there a way to deal with such psychiatric issues in a way that is consistent with the psychological theory of Vygotsky and his followers? Or do these issues represent a totally different subject matter belonging to the distinctive disciplines of psychiatry and clinical psychology, which use entirely different intellectual, investigative, and practical tools? Are Vygotskian approaches to being human in fact blind to major processes of human interpersonal development and to the consequences of that development for the social participation that Vygotsky identifies as the source of higher mental processes?

## VYGOTSKY AND PSYCHIATRIC THOUGHT

Certainly many, with some justice, have argued that such psychiatric issues are of little interest to a disciplined psychology, for psychiatric and clinical traditions appear to be deeply and irretrievably embedded within particular Western cultural traditions and forms of practice, especially as manifested in the upper and upper middle classes of the last century or so in Europe and the United States. Thus, psychiatric issues, problems, orientations, practices, and knowledge evaporate under cultural analysis into the currents of social history. Further, it has been argued that clinical psychiatry (whether Freudian or medical or some other version) is so embedded in individualistic models of experience, consciousness, and biology that it has to be misguided. From a socio-historic perspective, it suffers all the same faults that Cole (1996) noted in experimental psychology, even when it adopts a cross-cultural comparative mode, as cross cultural psychology does. In such a view, the phenomena that clinical psychology has examined are only artifacts of particular cultural histories or stigmatizations created by particular epistemic communities; psychiatric phenomena then have no status as fundamental theoretical constructs.

Vygotsky himself did not see it that way, however. Whereas the Russian Revolution may have provided theoretical optimism, the life around him provided much concrete evidence of psychological misery, which he himself investigated in considering defectology—both in terms of the psychosocial position of those with physical handicaps and those with unfortunate experiences of youth that made them antisocial (Vygotsky, 1993). Moreover, he was deeply interested in the

work of both Freud (see, e.g., Vygotsky, 1994) and Adler (see, e.g., Vygotsky, 1993), although he had qualifications about both. Indeed, Vygotsky's writings from the late 1920s suggest that Adler had a deep and lasting influence on Vygotsky in helping him articulate the compelling motive individuals have in learning to use tools, developing competence in interaction, entering into play situations that Vygotsky saw as the entry way into organized social activities, overcoming the difficulties of life, engaging in reflective understanding, and pursuing projects.

Vygotsky (1934) addressed psychiatric issues most explicitly in an article entitled "Thought in Schizophrenia," which was published in the Western journal *Archives of Neurology and Psychology*. This article drew on his account of the development of conceptual thinking expressed in *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1962), where the child moves from associations to complexes to pseudoconcepts to true concepts, based on the way in which the child attributes meanings to words. He found use of language by schizophrenics to indicate a deterioration of conceptual thinking. This article was familiar and influential in the West, largely transmitted by the psychotherapist Eugenia Hanfmann, the first co-translator of *Thought and Language*, and the psychiatrist Jacob S. Kasanin (Hanfmann & Kasanin, 1937; Kasanin & Hanfmann, 1938). A test Vygotsky used to diagnose the conceptual thought of schizophrenics (similar to the ones in his chapters on adolescent thought) became widely used by psychiatrists in the West and was known as the Vygotsky test. Vygotsky's test and theories figure substantially in the symposium volume, *Language and Thought in Schizophrenia*, edited by the same J. S. Kasanin (1944/1964). Even the volume of the title suggests the Vygotskian influence.

Prominent in that same volume is the lead essay by the American interpersonal psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan (1944/1964). Although he disagreed on some points with what he understands to be the Vygotskian position about the deterioration of language in schizophrenia, he expressed many deep similarities to Vygotsky's understanding of the phenomenon of schizophrenic speech, as Kasanin pointed out in his commentary. The difference is that whereas Vygotsky gave no causes for the linguistic-conceptual regression—in fact explicitly saying he left the causal mechanisms of regression to the psychiatrists to account for—Sullivan (1944/1964) specifically attributed the curious speech to security operations, which in his way of thinking were associated with anxiety or a sense of unease about potential outcomes with one's social partners. Further, these curious uses of speech are built on long biographical histories of language development, so that the person learns to use language in ways other than for direct communication—to lie, dissemble, misdirect attention, pacify, or otherwise make the self-protective best of what is perceived as a difficult interpersonal situation. Sullivan counterposed a prelinguistic embodied sense of situation and memory with the dissembling, misleading character of unfortunate language development, suggesting that an orientation to events that is free of the labyrinthine confusions of language may still be accessible to people whose language processes are most involuted. He ended by stating that

The schizophrenic's speech shows characteristic peculiarities because of recurrent severe disturbances in his relationships with other people and a result is a confusion concerning the structure of spoken and written language. Some of these peculiarities may be described as regressively related to the speech of very young children, but I hope that no scientist will be so careless to say that speech and thought in schizophrenia are regressive. (Sullivan, 1944/1964, p. 15)

Vygotsky (1934) ended his article by noting that schizophrenic language use seems to be associated with the withdrawal of the individual from the outside world, including the social world,

and that these linguistic usages, like all linguistic uses, have their origins in social relations and that they seem to have something to do with “the protective forces of the organism reacting with inner inhibitions to the weakness of the central nervous system [itself formed in its higher functions within social relations].” Vygotsky, as we sometimes forget, also recognized thought that precedes the reconfiguring understandings of the self, others, and the world that come with language development. Vygotsky, nonetheless, did not attend to the ways in which that language development can go wrong given unfortunate interpersonal circumstances of development, so he found no practical reason, other than to advance scientific understanding, for having people recover their embodied memories and sensations apart from their linguistically articulated form.

I have spent some time exploring the similarities and differences of Vygotsky and Sullivan on this particular issue precisely because the shared views suggest a deep affinity between the two at the same time as the differences indicate where the interests of Sullivan add a new dimension to the Vygotskian view. This added dimension may provide a means to bring typically psychiatric issues like anxiety, unfortunate early experience, negative affect, and dysfunctional behavior into the neo-Vygotskian world picture.

### SULLIVAN AND GABRIELE

Based on my personal and intellectual biography, I believe that interpersonal psychiatry is compatible with and adds a significant dimension to socio-historical psychology. The approach of Sullivan and the elaborations of one of his followers, Anthony B. Gabriele, recognize the great effect of social and cultural experience for the formation of persons. This approach provides a Vygotsky-like account of a person trying to learn to live in a social world he or she is born into, trying to satisfy needs with the available people, themselves already socialized, enculturated, and formed as selves, trying to expand into the available possibilities of life, learning how one may act in the world and with others successfully. Gabriele’s little known practical elaborations of interpersonal psychiatry, further, are consistent with situated micro-analytical approaches to learning within social contexts.

I present these thoughts neither as someone trained in clinical psychiatry or academic psychology nor as a practitioner in either of those fields. Therefore I cannot provide a detailed assessment of Sullivan’s or Gabriele’s thought and practices in the appropriate professional terms, nor can I compare and distinguish their contributions in detail from other approaches that others may find similar or related, such as object relations psychology, family systems therapy, or social cognitive therapy.<sup>2</sup> Professionally, I am concerned with the teaching of writing and the use of literacy in human interaction and the formation of culture. My approach to my profession, however, has drawn heavily, and I hope deeply, on both Sullivanian and Vygotskian lines of thought (along with other resources I do not discuss here), and I have found them mutually informing. The most I am able to offer is the meaning I have drawn from the work of these two men, the potential relation I see to Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskian approaches, and the applications of their work to the study of literate practice.

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<sup>2</sup>It may well be that other approaches to clinical psychology and psychiatry may be able to enter into dynamic dialogue with Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian work, but those dialogues have yet to be initiated.

Interestingly, followers of Sullivan have found the work of Vygotsky quite parallel. In the second volume of the journal Sullivan founded, *Psychiatry*, appeared an essay “*Thought and Speech*” by L. S. Vigotsky (1939), translated by the same Eugenia Hanfmann and Jacob Kasinin discussed earlier along with Helen Kogan. This is in fact the final chapter of Vygotsky’s (1962) *Thought and Language*, 23 years before the entire book was to be first published in English in another translation by Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar. More recently another Sullivan-inspired journal, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, devoted a special issue to the work of Vygotsky.<sup>3</sup> James Wertsch (1990) was the only Vygotskian to contribute to the issue, and he did not engage with Sullivan’s thought. Rather, he was cautionary, talking about the difficulty of integrating different traditions, specifically pointing to the issue of individualism in psychiatry. Although recognizing in a single short sentence that interpersonal psychiatry is an exception to that individualism, he never pursued this possibility. This is as much recognition of Sullivan’s work as I have found in the neo-Vygotskian literature. I have found no other uptake or even mention of Sullivanian thought anywhere in the Vygotskian world. This article is meant to redress that absence as well as to open the place of psychiatric issues within the Vygotskian world.

Because the synthesis I came to know is embodied in my experience and orientation to life’s practice, of which I see my academic research, theories, and teaching as an extension, and because my own experience has persuaded me of the compatibility of these views, I sketch here some personal facts. In the late 1960s, when I was 24 and working through issues of forming adult intimate relations in my own life and while I was involved in the early professional experiences and training that were to influence my career trajectory, I entered into therapy with the clinical psychologist, Anthony B. Gabriele. Gabriele was eclectic in his reading and approach, hardly doctrinaire or authoritarian, but as I read more deeply into Sullivan, I recognized the roots of Gabriele’s practice in Sullivan. I continued in regular therapy with him for 2 years and then saw him sporadically as a client and as a friend over the ensuing years. Over this period, we also reversed roles as I helped him work on his unpublished manuscript (Gabriele, 1996), *Making Intimacy: Relationships between Imperfect Partners*, finished shortly before his death of ALS in 1996.

What I learned from Tony predisposed me to socio-cultural accounts of human activity as a way to understand human interaction and need satisfaction and particularly the role of communication in the formation of relationships. As I later became familiar with socio-cultural, situated approaches to language in use and Vygotskian work, I was constantly surprised by the congruence of these two approaches in theory, practice, and accounts of concrete situations.

Because Vygotsky’s life and thought are well known to the readers of this journal, I focus attention on Sullivan and Gabriele in terms that should make the compatibilities and supplements to Vygotskian theory evident.

## HARRY STACK SULLIVAN’S INTERPERSONAL PSYCHIATRY

Sullivan’s life (1892–1949) bracketed that of Vygotsky, in the other land of great social change and emerging international power in the early 20th century, the United States. The child of immigrants, growing up in a small town in upstate New York, Harry Stack Sullivan, after an unsettled late ado-

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<sup>3</sup>Most articles in this issue consist of straightforward expositions of Vygotsky’s thought presented in the works and translated into English.

lescence and an early departure from college, studied medicine and psychiatry in Chicago. Like Vygotsky he laid the groundwork for his theories in practical work during the 1920s. He also had a left political orientation and saw his study of the human mind and social relations as part of bringing about a better social order and way of life. Unlike Vygotsky, he lived almost to mid-century, but like Vygotsky his work was only drawn together in his final years and edited and published by his students after his death.

Sullivan, like Vygotsky, was interdisciplinary in orientation, seeing along with his close friends the anthropologist Edward Sapir and political scientist Harold Lasswell the possibility of an integrated social science built around the development of personality within culture.<sup>4</sup> Language, culture, society, economics, and politics he saw as all bearing on people's life struggles and mental condition. The interdisciplinary journal he founded, *Psychiatry*, contained articles and reviews drawing on anthropology, political science, philosophy, sociology, economics, biochemistry, and cultural criticism. His circle also included anthropologists Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Hortense Powdermaker, Brunoslav Malinowski, and sociologist W. I. Thomas. His close ties, starting in the late 1920s, to the Chicago School of Sociology led him particularly to reformulate his interpersonal theories of the formation of the self along the lines of G. H. Mead.<sup>5</sup> His Meadian perspective made his work attractive to social psychologists such as Anselm Straus and Alfred Lindesmith (Lindesmith & Straus, 1956; Lindesmith, Straus, & Denzin 1991) and Tamotsu Shibutani (1961), who devoted substantial approving attention to both Sullivan and Vygotsky in their works.

Sullivan's (1953) most important work is a theoretical overview, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, drawn from his repeated lecture course.<sup>6</sup> In that book he drew a picture of human development that presents a child trying to satisfy needs in a social and cultural world, developing relations with others, and learning language within social interactions shaped by the material and cultural conditions of the time and place. The infant's most fundamental and deepest learning occurs in activity situations with primary caregivers, in which fundamental perceptions of the self and the self in relation to others are formed. In coordinating such activities as feeding, the child learns to coordinate with others and integrate in shared activities, satisfying mutual needs.

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<sup>4</sup>See the collection of Sullivan's (1964) essays on this subject, *The Fusion of Psychiatry and the Social Sciences*. Sullivan was also instrumental in creating two interdisciplinary colloquia on personality investigation in 1928 and 1929 (American Psychiatric Association, 1929, 1930). Both were sponsored by the American Psychiatric Association Committee on Relations of Psychiatry and the Social Sciences, and the second was also co-sponsored by the Social Science Research Council. When Sullivan founded the Washington School of Psychiatry his intention was explicitly interdisciplinary, and in the archives of that institution are numerous documents affirming that intention, such as an undated draft proposal for an Institute for Ethnic Psychiatry, authored by Sapir, Lasswell, and Sullivan, and the minutes of a small meeting of the Committee on Training Fellowships of the Committee on Personality in Relation to Culture, which the National Research Council held in New York in 1935. The meeting of seven (i.e., Sullivan, Benedict, Fromm, Sapir, Kurt Lewin, Adolf Meyer, and Clark Wissler) was to develop plans and evaluate candidates for postdoctoral positions for anthropologists wanting to learn psychiatry, so as to be able to study the relation between personality and culture. One of the interesting moments in this 2-day meeting is when they contemplate what kind of training in economics may be appropriate for such an interdisciplinary study, for they were all aware that the economic system and conditions were important influences on personality development, but they found the currently available versions of economics far too culture bound.

<sup>5</sup>See Cottrell (1978), Cottrell and Foote (1952), and Blitstein (1953).

<sup>6</sup>For a general introduction to Sullivan's thought see Evans (1996); for his biography see Perry (1982). The presentation here highlights issues of relevance to Vygotsky and language use.

Part of that coordination is the sensing of anxiety within the partner, which then raises anxiety within the infant, for the anxiety indicates possible difficulty and uncertainty of outcome of the situation. It is by discovering the ranges of security, interpersonal unease, and terror in interaction that the child forms a sense of the self (i.e., the good me—the range of action and interaction in which I will feel secure), the boundary areas of insecurity and anxiety (i.e., the bad me), and those interactions and activities beyond coherent perception and possible participation because they are so deeply imbued with extreme anxiety (i.e., the not me—the realm of uncanny sensations). One also learns means of coping with and avoiding those situations that raise anxiety as well as ways of deflecting one's attention entirely from situations that threaten one's very ideas of the self. An individual moves out into the world, which is filled with many people and situations that may challenge the secure senses of the self he or she may have developed within the tendernesses (such as they are) in the family. Within these new interactions, experience and sense of the self may expand, but most people spend much time in security operations, keeping at bay the anxiety aroused by the variety of life.

An individual's use of language is learned within that developmental history of relations and anxiety, and the meanings and uses found in language are deeply colored by the emotions of security and anxiety. A person learns to disrupt situations that provoke anxiousness, through such subterfuges as changing the subject, leading the situation down alternative paths that protect security, or otherwise being disjunctive of the trouble the anxious individual senses coming down the road. Such disjunctiveness transforms the situation into one that alleviates anxiety, even though it may no longer meet the individual's needs or the needs of others in the situation. In the most extreme cases, in the lives of people who have consistently unfortunate and anxiety-raising experiences, people learn to use language far more to ward off anxiety by placating or misleading or distancing others than to communicate with others within the positive satisfaction of needs. In such cases a radical disjunction develops between, on one hand, one's own needs and embodied experience—that is, the self one knows while withdrawing from the anxiety of relationships—and, on the other, the face one presents to the world to keep that world at bay. This social learning—of security and anxiety, of self-definition and taboo, of language use to modulate and fend off anxiety—adds another dimension to the social learning of language, culture, and interaction to those more typically noted by Vygotsky and socio-cultural psychologists. The personal anxiety system described by Sullivan, moreover, adds another dimension of aversive and mind clouding affect to the goal-shaped affects of motive and frustration in the Vygotskian canon.

Although Sullivan saw the origins of the self-system developing from prelinguistic sensations of anxiety, he saw the development of linguistic reflection on the self as extremely powerful in the extensive construction and monitoring of identity and in choice making as part of action. In short, language, for Sullivan as for Vygotsky, is the chief tool of reflective action. Sullivan, however, allowed for the interference of security operations to warp the processes of reflective choice making, to provide for indirect or even dysfunctional terms for reflecting on one's needs and desires, and to create distances between one's public expressions and one's inner sentiments. Sullivan, like Vygotsky, gave an account of the development of internal linguistic thought through an internalization process in which language goes sub-vocal and private, a process that Sullivan characterized as reverie formation.

The developing child, according to Sullivan, as he or she learns language and thereby learns to give shape to thought and coherence to perceptions of the world, moves through stages of prototaxic, parataxic, and syntactic modes of thought, which are closely congruent with

Vygotsky's stages of children's thought and perception prior to the reorganization of thought through language, as the child makes associative connections while using language to organize thought (i.e., Vygotsky's substages of congeries, complexes and collections, and pseudoconcepts), and when the adolescent develops coherent systems of language characterized as true concepts and accommodates thinking to the disciplined and schooled systems of concepts presented through the formal learning of the society—scientific concepts.

Sullivan's account of developmental mechanisms, like Vygotsky's, shows us how children learn the activities, tools, and language of the ambient culture of their time and place, to become part of their particular socio-cultural world. Sullivan's account additionally shows, as Vygotsky's does not, how the child picks up and responds to the affective atmosphere of the family and other intimates and comes to struggle with the values, taboos, anxieties, and insecurities alive in his or her household and that provide boundaries for the child's development and exploration until the developing person comes into contact with new groupings of people who make available wider ranges of experience in ways that protect a tolerably secure self. When we put Sullivan and Vygotsky together we can understand the patterns of cultural possibilities that create similarity and ranges of tolerated difference among the people of one time and place—alongside the patterns of intimate groupings, the cultures within each family and neighborhood and affinity group and alongside the idiosyncrasy of individuals who must wend their way through particular partners, emotional landscapes, and available growth experiences.

Sullivan's developmental model of a child learning to act in fulfillment of needs in interpersonal relations—within the cultural conditions of a time and place and within the particular dynamics of specific relationships—allows us to consider the issues, concerns, and phenomena addressed by psychiatry and related therapeutic fields without invoking culturally specific criteria of normality, without being caught up in particular forms of untoward behavior expressing themselves in particular historical circumstances, without postulating complex internal machinery, and without asserting complex structures of autonomous individuality. Nor does it have us see the obvious distress of people in psychological extremis as caused by any mechanism that is not present in all humans. Sullivan saw all humans driven by the same action-oriented dynamisms in pursuit of need satisfaction, no matter how culturally specific, displaced, or complicated the particular mechanisms may be.

Sullivan, like Vygotsky, emphasized an optimistic potential for growth into and beyond the available social and cultural arrangements and activities of one's time and place. Sullivan, however, did not see that growth as necessarily easy, as individuals must constantly face the anxiety of those things that stretch them beyond what they are comfortable with. This discomfiting anxiety makes it difficult for the individual to see what lies in front and around. It leads the individual to want to turn his or her eyes and thoughts elsewhere, back to the comfortable worlds where the individual can find a familiar self-definition and perception in interactions where all participants are secure. Sullivan's analysis suggests that in fostering growth-oriented relationships, mentors must address the resistances of learners' anxieties, uncertainties, terrors, and senses of where self-security lies. By respecting people's deeply ingrained senses of the self and security, the habits by which they have been able to protect those bounded secure selves, and their complexities of interaction and language resulting from coping with an anxiety-arousing world, teachers and mentors can help learners participate in novel experiences and forms of life.

## TONY GABRIELE'S PRAXIS AND PARTICIPATION THEORY

Gabriele directed our attention to how people can participate in more satisfactory and need-satisfying relationships despite the defensive operations of their self-security systems. To enable expansive participations, Gabriele helped clients discover more effective ways of entering into situations that would satisfy needs. As a therapist he trained his clients in micro-observation of unfolding situations in which they were participants, as though they were viewing their interactions through a video camera in the corner of the room. This was years before inexpensive, lightweight video cameras opened up the kind of micro-interactional analysis that is now common. He wanted his clients to see how situations could unfold in many ways depending on how we participated in them. He was particularly interested in clients observing where situations seemed to get off the tracks, where events seemed to be heading to one need-satisfying activity but seemed to turn into another, perhaps less satisfying outcome by some minor interactional monkey wrench that transformed attention, affect, and goals and that was likely to evoke a further distracting response of partners. He was looking for the operational consequences of the disjunctive impulses and behavior Sullivan identified.

These disjunctive behaviors were not to be expunged by self-correcting discipline. Rather, they were to be noticed only. Those moments of anxiety were to be identified so we could learn to live with them and act within them. He was interested in those mental and emotional disciplines that trained people to act and think with a full and creative response, even at times of high stress.<sup>7</sup> If individuals could, in situations of anxiety, maintain centered awareness of their situation and sensitivity toward need impulses, they could be more creative in response to closely observed situations, the material conditions of the situation, co-participants, and the social and cultural understandings invoked to shape the activity. In situations of great growth and importance, he felt individuals could still know what was going on and what they were doing, even as they acted spontaneously.

Gabriele called people's attention to the social typification processes by which events were mutually negotiated by participants. Through self-conscious recognition and naming of situations, people can more effectively orient to the situations and monitor their behavior as appropriate. Such explicit recognition of situations also encouraged explicit consensual recognition, agreement, and commitment to the unfolding activity. Paradoxically the recognition of typified activities facilitated greater creativity, as participants' energies could be focused on responsiveness to the local unfolding of detail—if people know they are playing tennis and want to be, or if they are discussing the evening news or sharing unspoken secrets of childhood, then they can spontaneously pursue their impulses within that mutually agreed-upon activity. Moreover, with explicitness, people can agree to novel transformations of events, driven by desires and needs that seem to arise within activity. This transformative spontaneity is particularly important as relationships move into those areas of growth where previously unrecognized needs and desires start to take shape, as one sees the possibilities that existed beyond the blinders of one's previous limitations. Gabriele's evocation of a sense of possibility encouraged clients to move beyond the limitations of the self they had developed, to locate spots they were heading toward, and to find

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<sup>7</sup>He suggested, for example, that clients read Eugen Herrigel's (1953) work, *Zen and the Art of Archery*.

spontaneous behaviors that allowed them to respond creatively and with motivation to the possibilities of situations.

In his later years Gabriele developed a tripartite account of what he came to call participation theory—the factors that made situations work well with need-satisfying spontaneity for all participants: consensuality, coordination, and competence. The first of these, consensuality, I have already discussed: People know what they are doing and admit to their willing participation in it, not under the tyranny or default decision of others or as feigned participation for the sake of harmonious appearances or other ulterior purposes. It is not nearly so easy as we imagine for people to freely, actively, and sincerely consent to any conjoint activity, and it happens far less frequently than it appears in the movies. Think of how difficult it is to gather a group of non-coerced tenured professors in a meeting on a subject of obvious importance to their lives and to focus their attention on the core matter that seemed to be the reason for the meeting. Of course, the world is filled with many coercions, surface acquiescences, passivity, regulations, authority relations, feignings, multiple definitions of single events, very low definitional events, and so on that make it appear that far more consensually cooperative participation occurs than is actually the case. Mutually consensual participation tends to occur with great frequency only in the most habituated and typified kinds of occasions, which people are deeply enculturated into, where people come regularly prepared to play—like baseball—and even then it is still a job to get a team focused and motivated.

The second factor, coordination, means that individuals explicitly cooperate in the unfolding of the event to let it become fully what it can become, whether it is moving furniture through doorways, figuring out a shared bedtime, discussing our ideas for something we are writing, or singing in group harmony—coordinating not only pitches but arrangements, rhythms, dynamics, and expression—along with the space for the spontaneous riffs that seem to come on us and may inspire the like from the other singers. Skilled coordinating language may be part of this, as when a writing coach knows how to ask the right questions, elicit the faint traces of budding ideas, and support and criticize at the right times and in the right amounts—or when furniture movers coordinate their perception of space with the positioning of moving objects by a few telegraphic instructions to each other. However, the coordination may be entirely through the senses. In the great majority of cases, mothers and perlinquistic infants learn to coordinate with each other in accomplishing the infant's basic needs for survival and comfort—feeding, hygiene, sleep—and the parent's needs for caregiving. In the process the infant develops some of the most primary and enduring modes of coordinating with others.

As micro-analyses of videotaped interaction have uncovered, even the most ordinary of conversations is an intricate and spontaneous dance of mutual orientation, alignment, and coordination accomplished through word, rhythm, intonation, vision, bodily position, and movement. However, as the same analyses have also shown, not everyone coordinates well with others all the time, whether because of cultural mismatches, uncomfortable social relations, idiosyncratic practices, gendered patterns, or other reasons. If this is true even at the level of bodily alignment and eye gaze, how much more is it in the more culturally varied and anxiety-evoking self-presentational practices of, say, a job interview or a first date. Whereas successes in carrying off such coordinated activities give rise to security and confidence and an expanded situational repertoire, failure gives rise to immediate unease and anxiety, risking further deterioration of the situation and long-term insecurity about engaging in similar activities. Coordination of our needs, intentions, thoughts, and self representations through language are some of the most difficult and cul-

turally intricate things people learn to do but are most necessary in leading the complex and various lives of a modern world built on symbols and communication.

Competence is, according to Gabriele, the last element of successful situations. As much as one may want to sing in a chorus, and as finely attuned as one may be to the people around, without some basic skill in singing and music—holding a pitch, having a feel for the rhythms, reading a score, listening to and blending with the other singers, following the technical directions of the conductor, and so on—one may not enjoy participating in a chorus. Without a modicum of such skills, a person would not likely consent to singing in a chorus, in anticipation of the great unease that will ensue, nor would the person likely be able to coordinate with others once in the chorus. The cycle of unease and terror is likely to keep the unskilled far away from such potential unpleasantness. On the other hand, if one knows enough to get by and be accepted, his or her skills are likely to increase the longer he or she sings with the chorus.

This learning over time by participation is familiar to Vygotskian and related situated-learning theories, such as legitimate peripheral participation (see Lave & Wenger, 1991) and learning by expansion (see Engeström, 1992), but with an added component of one's securities and anxieties interacting with the learning situations. Putting Vygotsky, Sullivan, and Gabriele together, we may see that the size and extent of one's zone of proximal development is framed by what one can already do, one's skill at cooperative distributed participation (i.e., acting in a limited role on partial knowledge), and what one can attend to with sufficient acumen and without mind-numbing anxiety. However, there are many zones of development one does not even enter into for fear of a perceived lack of competence. No matter how proximate these zones may be, people are kept from them by barriers of anxiety.

Tony pointed out that there far more micro-competences in any performance than appear obvious (e.g., being able to know when to turn the page on the score so as to be ready with the notes at the top of the next page, which itself depends on the competence to process notation ahead of where one is singing while not losing the note one is currently performing). Further, Tony pointed out, it is hard to anticipate which skills and micro-skills any individual has, given that individual experiences are so varied and biographies are so idiosyncratic. How much anxiety has been brought into a perfectly pleasant dinner because the inexperienced youth is worrying about how much to tip the car park valet? How much confusion has been wrought between couples because one partner never learned to monitor expenses in relation to a budget, whereas the other never learned how to share financial information?

Tony framed his praxis in an awareness of the changing socio-historical circumstances people find themselves in and particularly the demands of the current moment. The more limited experience, narrower ranges of freedom, and entrenched practices of traditional ways of life meant that people living in traditional communities had fewer choices to make, fewer people and situations to get along with, fewer hopes of individual satisfactions, and lesser expectations of life. The elective conditions of modern life, the greater number of people of varying experience individuals participate with in a wider variety of novel situations, and the expectation that individual needs will be satisfied more thoroughly have put great burdens on people's abilities to participate. Though those who live in complex, affluent, multicultural modern societies have enormously greater opportunities for experiences, they have to have a much more refined and detailed sense of what is going on, what they are doing with whom, and how they can go about doing it. This perception draws them not only into cultural historical analysis of the conditions, activities, tools, objects, relations, rules, and divisions of roles in life but also into a sociological analysis of the

differentiation and distancing of modern life, of how they live in multiple relationships and institutions, influenced by events, knowledge, and arrangements communicated over distances of time and space. How an individual communicates with the IRS influences his or her daily interactions with a life partner, for example, by placing demands on the partner to save certain receipts. The latest medical news from laboratory trials informs (we hope) people's spontaneous sexual practices. Although the world is filled with traditional folk wisdom about how to carry out traditional relationships, such slogans are blunt and misguided tools for reflecting on how to manage three job, four car, five computer, intermarried families in multiethnic communities.

## WRITING AND PARTICIPATION

Through working with Tony Gabriele, I gained a practical exposure to the role of language in activity and in the formation of lives. This experience deeply influenced my approach to writing as a form of socially situated participation, embedded within cultural history, and framed within discrete, describable situations and genres. The communicative acts of writing I saw as the means of extending oneself beyond one's prior realm, committing oneself to statements linked to the statements of others, within discrete areas of social action. These acts of growth are drenched with security issues, anxieties, and self-concept, just as they are richly constructed out of multiple complex competences of literate participation, social knowledge, and writing skill. In writing you put yourself on the line, and you learn to live with it. Although writing is deeply social, we often have to engage with it in semi-privacy, without the immediate support and security of the presence of other people. As writers alone at our desks, we regularly face our demons and uncertainties to plow into an anxiety-obscured unknown, driven by the spontaneous impulses of a possibly centered but potentially digressive consciousness, attuned we hope to the creative, spontaneous glimmerings of what we need to say and not blinded to the things we know about the subject and about our audience and our relation to them. At best our writings are driven by deep motivations and need satisfactions, among them the desire to integrate with others in successful collaborations to meet needs of oneself and society, and shaped by as wide a vision as we can muster. However, much can go wrong.

For reasons that should now be evident, work with Tony Gabriele predisposed me to look at the social interaction of reading and writing, the social location of writing within real-life activity systems and intertextual fields, the social organization of writing within disciplines and other discursive systems, genres and their relation to systems of activity, and situated activity approaches to human action and consciousness. In short, I was well prepared to discover the work of Vygotsky soon thereafter, but my view of Vygotskian approaches was tempered by a sense of the hard personal and interpersonal work it took to grow and extend oneself, to successfully engage with others, and to cope with the deep habits we have that make it difficult to keep our eye on the situation and task in front of us.

By reminding Vygotskian communities of the work of Sullivan and introducing them to the work of Gabriele, I hope to provide additional tools to understand the deep emotions that color all our activities in life and to understand the difficulty of learning by participating in educational situations. I hope to encourage people to think of learning as a form of participation and learning to participate as the most central form of learning. I hope to suggest that learning is particularly drenched in deep emotional issues, precisely because learning ex-

pands us beyond the secure realms of habit and prior senses of the self into new areas of competence and participation.

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