

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

More glasnost on Bekhterev perestroika

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My thanks to Antonio Puente (1995) for his letter calling attention to Bekhterev Institute and a neglected aspect of Russian neuropsychology. He says, "The question of why this psychometric approach is not known outside the former Soviet Union is an interesting one," and I agree. Like the Purloined Letter, this secret has been right under the noses of INS members since 1989!

After the 1988 INS meeting in Lahti, Finland, I took a train to Leningrad, walked through Bekhterev's front door, met some neuropsychologists, told them about INS, and in 1989 presented their posters at the Antwerp meeting. Neither I nor they knew how to get the authors there, but with the generous and expert help of Paul Deutsch, two (Marina Guseva and Elena Kumkova) were able to present in person at the Kissimee meeting, February 1990. We doubled the number that spring: Drs. Guseva and Kumkova were joined by Yaakov Meerson and Alexander Zaltsman to present papers at Innsbruck.

The number doubled again in 1991, when they were joined by Bekhterev's Alexandra Tarkhan, two representatives of the "alternative" tradition from St. Petersburg's Sechenov Institute of Evolutionary Physiology and Biochemistry (Tatiana Chernigovskaya and Inna Vartanian), and one from the "Moscow/Luria" tradition (Bella Kotic). Aeroflot dumped them in New York City, but acting on a timely suggestion from Allan Yozawitz, the New York Neuropsychology Group was able to locate eight members willing to buy tickets immediately and name a Russian "fellow traveler" in a 2-for-1 deal to get them from NYC to San Antonio and back.

After that meeting, Dr. Kumkova stayed here, continues to work as a neuropsychologist and to present papers at INS meetings. Of the others, only Dr. Chernigovskaya was able to attend another meeting (Cincinnati). Some have had to leave neuropsychology (for example, Dr. Guseva would probably emphasize her mathematical and managerial experience if following Dr. Kumkova here now), but Chernigovskaya is developing a neuropsychology program for St. Petersburg State University.

I question the emphasis on "psychometric tests": an earlier venue for Bekhterev publications had been *Neuropsychologia*, and "clinical/experimental" seems more appropriate. Kumkova's birdsongs (1990) might lead to a new nonvisual nonverbal memory test, but her Antwerp paper examines fundamental aspects of left- vs. right-hemisphere encoding strategies or abilities (Kumkova & Zaltsman, 1990), as do the spatial frequency (e.g., Guseva, 1990) and visual priming studies (Zaltsman, 1990).

I also question whether the Bekhterev/Sechenov and Luria approaches are "diametrically opposed." Always cosmopolitan, St. Petersburg has recently had neuropsychologists who tried to draw upon the "North American" experimental tradition despite the isolation imposed by political and economic constraints and despite the pressures of orthodoxy, but benefited also from an intimate understanding of the Luria tradition in some of their clinical work.

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¹ In her initial INS presentations, Dr. Kumkova anglicized her name to "Helen", but returned to "Elena" in subsequent papers and in the INS directory.