

Luria's ideas in East and West

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Luria's life embodied a contradiction between personal conformism and intellectual dissent. One might say that the former was the price he had to pay for the latter. His approach to neuropsychology was alien to, and ahead of, the dogmas of his time and place. Lurian notions of cognitive hierarchies and functional systems anticipated the "post-modular" understanding of the brain that is taking shape only now in modern cognitive neuroscience. Luria is among the principal intellectual forefathers and architects of the contemporary dynamic, interactive vision of the brain, which is only beginning to replace modularity as the dominant neuropsychological paradigm. Luria's having been ahead of his time and out of sine with his place is reflected in the vectors of his scientific reputation: he is more famous today than twenty years ago, his influence on North American psychology is more pervasive than on Eastern European psychology. In my interactions with Luria I was first perplexed, then amused by his fundamental indifference toward the fate of his intellectual legacy on the Soviet soil. The indifference was unspoken but unmistakable to those who knew him well. Locally, his concern was for the survival of his persona, not of his ideas. He went through the mandatory motions of survival obediently, even eagerly, yet with a detachment tinged with disdain. In an elusive but perceptible way his posture was that of someone surrounded by a mob, not an audience. His true passion of an artist yearning for approval was reserved for the West.

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