

Biography of G.P. Shchedrovitsky

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Text prepared by G.A. Davydova on the basis of autobiographical materials.

Georgy Petrovich Shchedrovitsky was born on 23 February 1929 in Moscow. His father, Pyotr Georgiyevich, a graduate of the Moscow Higher Technical School, worked in the aviation industry. His mother, Kapitolina Nikolaevna, worked as a doctor after graduating from the First Moscow Medical Institute.

In 1946 G.P. Shchedrovitsky entered the faculty of physics at Moscow University (specializing in theoretical physics). His field of scientific interests had already been formed during his first years at the Physics Department – structure of scientific theories with an intention to work out a project of the theory of thinking. This predetermined his move to the Philosophy Faculty (1949), where he got involved in philosophical problems of natural science and then in logic and methodology of science. While still a fourth year student, he began teaching at school (logic, psychology, physics). In 1953, he graduated with honours from the Faculty; his thesis was devoted to the mechanisms of development of scientific notions.

Immediately after graduation G.P. Shchedrovitsky begins working on his doctoral dissertation *Linguistic Thinking and Methods of its Analysis*, trying to combine in a special way the ideas, means and methods of logic, linguistics, psychology and sociology. After defending his thesis, he was awarded a Ph.D. degree in Philosophy (1964).

Georgy Petrovich's first scientific articles (on problems of thinking and thinking activity) date back to 1957. At the same time, the programme of complex research of thinking and activity developed by him together with N.G. Alexeev and I.S. Ladenko was published in the journal *Doklady APN RSFSR*¹. The program is still being implemented in many researches.

His seminars occupy a special place in his scientific and pedagogical activities because this was the way to involve students and young scientists in his research programs. Since 1955 he held a seminar on methodology and in the same year he organised a seminar on the complex and systematic study of thinking (at the Department of Logic in the Philosophical Department of MSU²). In March 1958 Georgy Petrovich organized (jointly with V.V. Davydov and with the support of Professor P.A. Shevarev) the Commission on the Psychology of Thinking and Logic within the AllUnion Society of Psychologists, whose activity he maintained until the

¹APN RSFSR – Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the Russian Federation.

²Moscow State University

end of his life. Finally, in 1962 at the Council on Cybernetics of the USSR Academy of Sciences he established (jointly with V.N. Sadovsky and E.G. Yudin) an interdisciplinary seminar on structural-system analysis methods in science and technology, which he headed until 1976. The results of this seminar were published, in particular, in *Problems of Systems and Structure Research*³ (1965) and a brochure of G.P. Shchedrovitsky *Problems of System Research Methodology*⁴ (1964).

Since April 1958 Georgy Petrovich starts working in the APN RSFSR publishing house: he is in charge of psychology, physiology and industrial training sections of the Pedagogical Dictionary; later he edits the works of N.K. Krupskaya, P.P. Blonsky, books on theory and history of pedagogy in the Pedagogical Editorial Board. During those years he also works in the theory department (as editor) of the journal *Questions of Psychology*.

His main area of scientific interest during those years is the structural-systemic analysis of knowledge and thinking activity, the place and limits of logical and normative methods of thinking analysis, and their relation to psychological and psychological-pedagogical research of thinking.

From October 1960 to August 1965 G.P. Shchedrovitsky worked as a junior research associate at the Laboratory of Psychology and Psychophysiology of the Research Institute of Preschool Education at the OPN of the RSFSR, where he was engaged in problems of mental development of preschool children, playing of children and its role in the development of "child's society", and development of preschool and school children in terms of learning as well as the analysis and typology of teaching-learning situations. The main topics of research of this period include *Investigations of Children's Thinking on the Material of Solving Arithmetic Tasks* (publications of 1960, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1974), *The Methodology of Pedagogical Investigation of Playing* (1963, 1964, 1966, 1973), *Interrelation of Learning and Development from a Systemic Perspective* (1966, 1968, 1974). At the same time Georgy Petrovich (together with B.V. Sazonov, V.M. Rozin, N.I. Nepomniashchaya, N.G. Alexeev and A.S. Moskaeva) prepared for publication his fundamental work *Pedagogy and Logic* reflecting basic research directions in the framework of substantial-genetic logic and activity theory.

Since 1960 G.P. Shchedrovitsky pays much attention to the problems of speech and language and outlines a program of building system-activity semiotics. The main works of this trend are: *On the Method of Semiotic Research of Sign Systems* (published in 1963, 1965, 1967), *The Natural and the Artificial in Sign Systems* (1965, 1966, 1967), *On Basic Approaches in the Studying of Signs and Sign Systems* (1964, 1965, 1967).

In VNII⁵ of Technical Aesthetics of the USSR State Committee for Science and Technology (August 1965 – March 1969), G.P. Shchedrovitsky as a senior researcher leads the Design Methodology group. The basic notions of activity theory, in particular of project thinking and planning activities, methods of historical and historical-critical analysis become the main target of his research. The studies of this period are reflected in the works *Design in a system of independent planning*⁶ (1965–1967) and *Thinking of a Designer* (1966–1969). At the same time, an attempt is made to transfer the notions of a sphere of activity developed on the material of design to the sphere of pedagogy and linguistics: *A System of Pedagogical Research*

³Проблемы исследования систем и структур.

⁴Проблемы методологии системного исследования.

⁵Allunion Institute of Scientific Research

⁶Дизайн в системе обосновывающегося проектирования

(publications 1966 and 1970), and *The Methodological Sense of the Problem of Linguistic Universals* (1966 and 1969). Additionally, sociological approaches to the study of activity and thought are being developed and deepened, and problems of organisation, leadership, and management are becoming increasingly important. Studies of scientific and technological movements – design, systemic, organisational and managerial, etc. – are started.

In February 1968 a trial was held in Moscow against A. Ginzburg and Y. Galanskov, who had studied at the school where Georgy Petrovich had taught at the same time. For this or for some other reason, he signed a collective letter of cultural and scientific figures to the leaders of the CPSU and the government in defence of the accused. In July-August of the same year by the decisions of the Regional and Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union G.P. Shchedrovitsky was expelled from the CPSU (that he entered in 1956) "for actions used to the detriment of the Party and country". As consequence the printing of *Pedagogy and Logic* was stopped, such that the book not came out in full circulation until 1993.

Nevertheless, up to March 1969 Georgy Petrovich continued to work in the department of theory and methodology of design of VNIITE⁷, headed the preparation of a collective monograph *Methodological Problems of Design Theory* – until the sudden dismissal from the Institute due to staff cuts. The immediate cause was an "answer" in the newspaper *Pravda*, signed by the then editor-in-chief V. Afanasyev, to an article by G.P. Shchedrovitsky entitled *Scientific Data or Self-Delusion* in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. The article (the title was given by the newspaper) asserted that, until sociology has formed its own scientific subject, the specific sociological research conducted cannot be regarded as scientifically substantiated.

As a result, Georgy Petrovich was left without a job and – in the long run – without means of subsistence, since in those years few people would have dared to hire a PhD in philosophy who had been expelled from the Party. However, such people were found: in April 1969, Shchedrovitsky joined the staff of the Central Training and Experimental Studio of the Union of Artists of the USSR, first as a methodologist, and later as head of the teaching-methodological laboratory.

During this period, disregarding the "circumstances", Georgy Petrovitch continues to work on problems of semiotics and theory of understanding (hermeneutics), studies the specifics of projecting, planning and programming thinking, analyses the prospects of methodological thinking and methodology, specific forms of methodics and methodical work, using every opportunity to publish the results of his (and the collective) research.

The main works of this period include *Sense and meaning in the structure of sign*⁸ (publications of 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1974), *Problems of Historical Development of Thinking*⁹ (1973, 1974 and 1975), and *Systemic Movement and Perspectives of Systemic-Structural Methodology*¹⁰ (1974, 1979, 1981 and 1985). That was also the time when he started intensive development of the bases for a general theory of activity, reflexion processes and their role in the development of activity, and a more detailed analysis of communication processes. Major publications within the framework of this trend were *Meaning and Knowledge*¹¹ (1971),

⁷Allunion Institute of Scientific Research on Technical Aesthetics

⁸Смысл и значение в структуре знака

⁹Проблемы исторического развития мышления

¹⁰Системное движение и перспективы развития системно-структурной методологии

¹¹Значения и знания

*Activity, Communication, Reflexion*¹² (1974), *Sense and Understanding*¹³ (1977).

In 1975, a collective (A. Rappoport, O. Genisaretsky, B. Sazonov and others) monograph *The Development and Implementation of Automatic Systems in Design. Theory and Methodology* was published. In the section *Initial Concepts and Categorical Means of Activity Theory*, written by Georgy Petrovich, the main conceptions of the activity theory and of the system approach were assembled.

In October 1974 G.P. Shchedrovitsky joins the Moscow Regional State Institute of Physical Education as a senior lecturer at the Department of Pedagogical Disciplines. He gave lectures in pedagogy and the history of pedagogy, introduction to speciality, and conducted courses on the methodology of scientific-pedagogical research in the domain of sports and on the methodology of design of sports training systems, as well as special courses on the socio-psychological structure of sports collectives and teams. Since 1977, he has organised research on *Methodological Recommendations for Designing an Annual Training Cycle (Content and Models of Organising Training sessions for Olympic Reserve Coaches)*.

The interest shown in the methodology by sports managers is understandable: the Moscow Olympic Games are approaching. Since 1974 Georgy Petrovich is a member of the Scientific Council of the Sports Committee of the USSR and Head of the Commission for Structural-Systemic Research and Development in Physical Culture¹⁴ and Sport. During three years the Commission held five All-Union meetings on problems of structured analysis of physical culture and sports. During the same years G.P. Shchedrovitsky led (together with L.N. Zhdanov) the Scientific-Methodological Seminar on problems of physical culture and sports at the Moscow State University of Physical Culture and Sport (since 1976) and the implementation of the complex scientific-methodological research programme of industrial practices and practical preparation of students (since 1979) organised by the USSR Ministry of Higher Education.

During this period the main subjects of research are forms of organisation of collective thinking and activity, organisational and socio-psychological structure of collectives, communication in groups and in collectives, interdisciplinary relations. His principal texts are: *On the basic aspects of sociological research in physical culture and sport as a field of activity* (1977), *On the basic problems and directions of scientific-methodological research in the field of sport* (1977), *The complex organisation of scientific research as a socio-technical system* (1979) and others.

In 1979 Georgy Petrovich began research on *Analysis of Techniques of Solving Complex Problems and Tasks under Conditions of Incomplete Information and Collective Action*. On their basis he developed a new form of organising collective thinking and activity aimed at solving complex interdisciplinary, industrial, scientific-technical and managerial problems, which was called Organisational Activity Games¹⁵ (OAG). In the period of 1979–1991 G.P. Shchedrovitsky conducted more than 90 OAGs, that served themselves as material and means of further research in the field of thinking, activity, understanding and reflexion. In 1983 Shchedrovitsky and a group of coauthors prepared within the framework of the theme *Prospects and Ways to Automate the Systems of Thinking Activities*¹⁶ the following works: *Situational Analysis and*

¹²Деятельность, коммуникация, рефлексия

¹³Смысл и понимание

¹⁴физкультура

¹⁵организационно-деятельностные игры

¹⁶Перспективы и пути автоматизации систем мыследеятельности

Analysis of Situations, Schemes and Signs in Thinking and Activities, Schemes in Thinking and Signs in Communication, Working with Schemes in Organisational Activity Games.

In 1980–1983 G.P. Shchedrovitsky is working (as senior researcher) in the Psychology Department of the Research Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology of the APN of the USSR. In December 1983, due to changes in the head of NIIOPP¹⁷ and the decision of the APN Presidium to close all research related to the psychology of organisational management, Shchedrovitsky moves to the Department of Methodology and Theory of Engineering Studies at the Central Research Institute of the USSR Gosstroj, which in 1986 was transferred (in the process of reorganisation) to the Institute of Production and Scientific Research of Engineering Studies and Construction of the USSR Gosstroj.

The main research topics of this period were: *Category of complexity of design of explorational projects*¹⁸ and *Typology of situations of explorational projects*¹⁹. At the same time Georgy Petrovich conducted an interuniversity seminar on the system approach in geology at the Gubkin Moscow Institute of Petrochemical and Gas Industry.

Shchedrovitsky's next place of work was the All-Union Research Institute of Theory of Architecture and Urban Planning where he was the head of the Laboratory of Organisation of Projecting and Construction (December 1988 – April 1992), recovering the former line of projecting and program development.

The last place of Georgy Petrovich's work was the International Academy of Business and Banking (now Togliatti Management Academy) (April 1992 – 1994). Here he headed a group of his students who created the Network of Methodological Laboratories for Designing Modern Education System and Methodological Training and began to implement this project.

All in all Georgy Petrovich published about 150 works, among them in the USA, England, Germany, Bulgaria and other countries. But this is only a part of what was written by him during 40 years of active work, unceasing reflections, discussions and conversations with colleagues, friends and pupils.

The last years of his life, which coincided with the period of perestroika, led to the socialisation of the methodology. Within the Union of Scientific and Engineering Societies of the USSR G.P. Shchedrovitsky created the Committee on SMD-Methodology²⁰ and Organisational Activity Games, organized and conducted five All-Union Congresses of Methodologists (Kiev, Samara, Moscow), the last of which (1993) was dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Moscow Methodological Circle.

G.P. Shchedrovitsky died on 3 February 1994.

¹⁷Scientific Research Institute of General Pedagogy and Psychology

¹⁸Категория сложности производства проектно-изыскательских работ

¹⁹Типология ситуаций проектно-изыскательских работ

²⁰СМД-методология = системо-мыследеятельностная методология methodology of systemic thinking and acting