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In Memoriam: Vladimir Gheorghiu

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IN MEMORIAM:  
Vladimir Gheorghiu

Dr. Vladimir Aristos Gheorghiu died at the age of 84 on May 20, 2010, following a long illness. He was known as a Nestor of modern research on suggestion, a visiting professor of psychology at the University of Giessen, a creative researcher and critic, someone who thought outside of the box, a lovable person, and an inspiring colleague. He leaves behind two sons in Romania from his first marriage, his wife, Ursula, and daughter, Cornelia, in Germany.

Vladimir Gheorghiu was an esteemed member of the international hypnosis community. He was a cofounding member of the International Society of Hypnosis (ISH) in 1973 in Uppsala, Sweden, and, in 1978, a founding member and member of the board of the European Society of Hypnosis (ESH). In addition to membership in various national hypnosis societies, including the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH), he was also an honorary member of all four German professional hypnosis societies. In 1998, he was awarded the Milton Erickson Prize from the Milton Erickson Society for Clinical Hypnosis Germany (MEG), and in 2000, the Ernest Hilgard Award of the International Society of Hypnosis (ISH).

Gheorghiu was born on January 13, 1926, in Berlin, the youngest of four children. His father was Romanian and his mother German, and they had lived in Berlin since 1911. In 1916 during World War I, Romania entered the war against Germany, and life became increasingly difficult for the family, especially after Hitler came into power in 1933. In 1936, the Gheorghius moved to Constanza, Romania, the elder Gheorghiu’s birthplace.

Vladimir Gheorghiu finished his psychology degree in Bucharest in 1955. Two years later, he became an assistant researcher at the Psychological Institute of the Romanian Academy of Sciences and was promoted in 1958 to researcher. In 1964, he became head of research. In 1968, Gheorghiu arrived at the University of Mainz in Germany as a Humboldt scholar. He finished his doctorate there in 1969 in hypnotic hypermnnesia and amnesia. In 1973, his postdoctoral dissertation followed, titled “Investigations on Sensory and Motor Suggestibility.”

Life then became more difficult. A project supported by the German Research Society had to be conducted from Bucharest, because Gheorghiu was refused a departure permit to Germany. In 1982, the entire Psychological Institute in Bucharest was dissolved, and the scientists were prohibited from publishing or practicing psychology.
through teaching or research. They were deprived of their degrees and forced to separate from their families and take on factory work. Gheorghiu, who was then 53 years old, was forced to work in an industrial laundry. The ministry of education inspected his publications and manuscripts for suspected ideological infringements. The government banned Gheorghiu’s two books because of such supposed breaches.

In July 1982, his application for emigration from Romania was rejected, and he was deprived of his citizenship as punishment for applying. Being aware of the severe consequences of this condition, he turned to foreign colleagues, among them Ernest Hilgard in Stanford, California, and Peo Wikström in Stockholm, Sweden, who wrote letters to Ceaușescu, then dictator of Romania. Gheorghiu’s departure was finally permitted.

In 1983, at the age of 57, the stateless Gheorghiu arrived in Germany and started anew; however, both his sons in Romania were prohibited from contacting their father and threatened with dismissal from their jobs. The situation finally changed after 1989–1990 with Ceaușescu’s overthrow.

In Germany, Gheorghiu was able to continue his research. From 1983 until he retired in 1991, he worked as a visiting professor at the Psychological Faculty of the University of Giessen, where he supervised a number of theses and a dissertation on the subject of suggestion.

Two special qualities contributed greatly to the reputation of Gheorghiu’s work in the area of suggestion. First, he was exceptionally creative; he was resourceful at inventing new test procedures and experimental designs, which led to the construction of equipment to measure suggestibility on all sensory and motor levels of human cognition (see, e.g., Gheorghiu, 1971a, 1971b; Gheorghiu & Reyher, 1982; Gheorghiu & Walter, 1989). His visions of expanding the scope of suggestibility to new fields of research, such as social psychology, memory, perceptual physiology, and medical therapy (see, e.g., Gheorghiu & Orleanu, 1982), were an expression of this creative spirit.

Gheorghiu also charmingly and convincingly inspired others with his research on suggestion, which led to fruitful collaborations. Some of the most successful occurred after his tour of North America in 1984. He had set out to find colleagues in the United States and Canada to discuss research on suggestion and suggestibility and to invite them to participate in a symposium on the subject. He recruited nine North American colleagues as well as others from Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, and even Australia to take part in Giessen in 1987. This symposium also received much support from colleagues in German universities involved in cognitive, physiological, and social-psychological aspects of research on suggestion. The output of this symposium can be found in its condensed form in the book *Suggestion and Suggestibility*, coedited by Vladimir Gheorghiu, Petra Netter, Hans Juergen Eysenck, and Robert Rosenthal. This book is still viewed as
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a benchmark and standard of work of research in this area. In 1994, the second symposium of its kind took place in Rome together with Vilfredo DePascalis (DePascalis, Gheorghiu, Sheehan, & Kirsch, 2000); in 2000, the third took place in Munich; the fourth in 2003 was in Krakau with Romuald Polczyk; and the fifth took place during the annual congress of the Milton Erickson Society for Clinical Hypnosis in 2010 in Bad Kissingen, Germany. Although it was held in his honor, Vladimir Gheorghiu was unable to attend this last symposium due to his severe health.

These symposia were characterized not only by the diversity of the participating countries and institutes but more importantly by the content in which the significance of suggestive processes emerged within the framework of cognition, judgment, memory, social behavior, and clinical-therapeutic contexts. This was one of the salient concerns of Vladimir Gheorghiu: to expand awareness of the universality of suggestive processes—whether in an experimental laboratory or in everyday life—among representatives of all psychological disciplines as well as among those outside psychology.

Even though Gheorghiu recognized that interest in suggestion had developed on the grounds of hypnosis, it was his idea to separate suggestion and suggestibility from this context. His area of interest was in the experimental investigation of fundamental influences on suggestion, such as variables of test procedures, induced expectations, sensory processes, or persons involved. Vladimir Gheorghiu built bridges from the historical roots of research in suggestion, such as the works of Binet, Bertrand, over Eysenck, Stukat, Hilgard, or Weitzenhoffer, to laboratory experiments and observations in everyday life.

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References