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A dialogue with Holzkamp on the matter of subjectivity

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Abstract
Holzkamp was the only psychologist of his time, sharing his cultural, political and historical representation of psychology, who considered the topic of subjectivity as central for his work. He did not understand subjectivity by using only an intra-psychical definition, but as continuously interwoven between the inner resources of individuals and the societal conditions within which human existence takes place. Holzkamp was a pioneer in exploring the close relationship between subject and subjectivity. The definition of the subjective character of action was advanced through this relationship, taking the opposite direction to the consideration of action as a purely instrumental function. Nonetheless, defining subjectivity as specific to human beings, Holzkamp did not advance a specific ontological definition that permits the differentiation of subjectivity from psychological processes as such. This paper will discuss the difference between Holzkamp and other critical authors that have used culture and symbolic processes as their flag while omitting individuals and subjectivity. Finally, there is discussion of the gaps in Holzkamp's work, through which, in the opinion of the author, it is important to advance Holzkamp's legacy.

Keywords
subjectivity, Holzkamp and Critical Psychology, Soviet Psychology, cultural-historical theory, subjective sense

Introduction

The topic of subjectivity is one of unsettled significance for philosophy and the social sciences. In fact, it has been indistinctly used as self, as consciousness, as well as to refer to internal universal essences of human beings (Harre, 1995; Shotter, 1993). Frequently subjectivity has appeared associated with subjectivism, specifically as a result of the modern philosophy of consciousness

that has departed from Descartes's "penseé as the indubitable certainty", subordinating the feeling of existence to the capacity of thinking.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the huge advances in natural sciences and technology found their philosophical expression in positivism, sharing a notion of knowledge as objective, predictable and subject to systems of laws. This representation of knowledge, closely related to the dominant method of doing science, prevailed until the beginning of the twentieth century, and strongly influenced the social sciences as well. Nonetheless, a crude empirical version of doing science has prevailed in psychology until the present day (Danziger, 1990; Koch, 1999).

In the social sciences positivism exerted a strong influence through the work of Comte and Durkheim. This influence led to a split in the social sciences on basis of their objectives, leading to the concept of discipline, as is presently the case. Due to this split between sciences on the basis of a narrow definition of their object, two very interrelated domains, society and human psychology, have remained separated up until the present. As a result, the representation of the human psyche was individualized and the representation of social processes depersonalized. However, the relevance of sociologists such as Max Weber and Norbert Elias was that they, from the beginning of this discipline, gave an important place to subjective processes and to individuals in their accounts of society (Elias, 2000; Weber, 1992).

In philosophy, the concept of experience, as treated by Dewey, highlighted the subjective side of human beings, transcending the illusion created by the objectivism that reality could be apprehended in its own terms (Dewey, 1920, 2016).

Marxism significantly contributed towards overcoming the representation of human beings as carriers of a universal nature. Marx's postulate, in his Theses on Feuerbach, about human essence as "the ensemble of social relations", was a key theoretical resource in transcending naturalism in the comprehension of human being. Furthermore, in the same work, Marx advanced an important premise for considering subjectivity: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively" (Marx, 1976, p. 6). This statement was not properly developed by Marx or advanced within Marxist philosophy, which is one reason why it was overlooked by the different theories that are grouped within a Marxist framework.

The more serious efforts to develop a Marxist psychology in the twentieth century were conducted by Soviet psychology. Nonetheless, those efforts were monopolized by the dominant official versions that characterized Soviet

psychology at the different stages of its development, namely Pavlovian reflexology, Kornilov's reactology and Leontiev's activity theory. These three approaches were determinist, reductionist and objectivist. However, these trends did not exhaust the legacy of Soviet psychology, which was first and foremost a cultural-historical psychology. Soviet psychology repeated the defect stressed by Marx in regards to preexisting forms of materialism.

One of the serious mistakes that, in my opinion, has been made in Western interpretations of and assumptions about either Vygotskian or Soviet psychology, has been to discuss its main contributions while omitting the political and historical contexts within which the different stages of that psychology took place (González Rey, 2014). The Soviet consolidation of political power on the basis of Marxism, transformed it into an ideology that led to a non-dialectical materialism that considered consciousness as a result of the objective reality, without giving room to the matter of subjectivity.

Holzkamp, despite his dialogue with Soviet psychologists, was critical in relation to the individualistic and deterministic character of that psychology. Critical psychology, which he founded, even though it was highly influenced by Marxism, was critical of the path taken by Marxist concepts within these philosophical, sociological and psychological traditions. Nonetheless, as Brockmeier has stated, "Holzkamp's theoretical trajectory was grounded in a view of the human subject as ultimately societal and historical, that is, a cultural subject" (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 217). The ignorance of Holzkamp within Soviet psychology is noteworthy, as well as more recently within the cultural historical activity tradition, as Soviet psychology has been caricatured in the West for some decades (Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2004).

Holzkamp, in his theoretical proposal, had the merit of advancing topics that were completely ignored by the cultural-historical approach, as developed by Soviet psychology, and, at the same time, progressing on the topics of subject and subjectivity as inseparable. His work was creative and original, opening a new way of doing psychology that advanced, simultaneously with many others, within some of the key topics of psychology, as well as on the methodological and practical implication of his proposal.

This paper discusses Holzkamp's achievements and the limitations of his approach to subjectivity. Through dialogue with Holzkamp an alternative path to the answers for some of the questions he raised will be introduced on the basis of our proposal of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint.

Holzkamp's contributions to advancing a critical cultural- historical approach in psychology

Holzkamp decisively advanced beyond three of the main failures of the cultural-historical psychology, as developed by Soviet psychology: 1. – a narrow representation of culture and of social life, with the latter referring more often than not to the immediate social environment; 2. – the omission of subjectivity in Soviet psychology; 3. – the individualistic approach of Soviet psychology. These three failures limited the critical potential of Soviet psychology, since its institutions, policies and social practices mostly remained beyond the scope of the problems that it dealt with; the only exceptions were V.N. Miasichev, who critically studied labor institutions, and L.I. Bozhovich and her group in their works concerning school.

I want to make explicit the differences stressed above between Holzkamp and Soviet psychology, because they are very illustrative of some of the gaps that, up until the present day, characterize the cultural-historical or cultural historical activity theories in Western psychology.

One position that allowed Holzkamp to transcend the borders within which Soviet psychology remained confined, was his position in relation to Marxism. As with any philosophy, Marxism took the form of a dominant interpretation that froze Marx's legacy as a number of principles, which, based on Marx's own assumptions, ignored other possible interpretations of that legacy that could be addressed toward new interpretations and theoretical paths in relation to the human psyche.

Holzkamp sharply draws a picture of the dominant lenses through which Marxism was used in psychology. In this regard, he stated:

> As many futile attempts have shown, progress in this direction cannot be made by starting with the Marxist "anatomy of bourgeois society" and expecting to arrive at a conception of the individual from the dissection and specification of the mode of production in particular capitalistic societies. No matter how precise and detailed such an analysis may be, the "individuals as such" remains somehow out of reach. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 51)

Soviet psychology, in its attempt to be a materialistic psychology, departed from a comprehension of the naive and very mechanistic materialist interpretation of Marx, based on the politically irreconcilable contradiction between idealism and materialism. This way of vindicating the Marxist character of psychology was shared both by official political official spheres and by politically dominant circles within psychology throughout its different stages of development.

Distancing himself from this position, Holzkamp argued: “The choice remaining appears to be either to ‘economize’ the individual, such that social relations are substituted for it, and wrongly understanding the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, the ‘individual’ is looked upon as the ‘ensemble of social relations’” (1991, p. 51).

The difficulty pointed out by Holzkamp was, to a great extent, responsible for the impossibility of Soviet psychology advancing towards an ontological definition of subjectivity as a new kind of phenomenon characteristic of human processes and realities, whether social or individual. The dominant way in which Marxism influenced Soviet psychology was clearly expressed in the next statement:

> [A]ll the richness of the ideas expressed by Marxist classical authors concerning subjective experience were not adequately interpreted by Soviet philosophers; we did not create a Marxist philosophical anthropology. (Consequently) the concept of subjective experience found no place in the language system of our philosophy. Precisely for this reason, the transition from Marxist philosophy to psychological theory was very complex. (Radzijovsky, 1988, p. 126)

As seen from Radzijovsky’s statement, Soviet psychology not only disregarded subjectivity, but it also had a very narrow comprehension of culture and of social reality. The narrow comprehension of symbolic realities, mostly reduced in function to sign mediation of psychological functions in Vygotsky’s work, and to language, led to the symbolical character of social life itself being overlooked. This fact was present in the individual character of Soviet psychology.

Holzkamp seriously advanced theory with regard to the comprehension of the specific character of human social realities through two important and very interrelated concepts: his definition of the societal character of human realities and his concept of everyday life. Whereas his definition of the societal character of human realities led to a new representation of social processes as inseparable from their subjective side, through which social and individual appear as constituents of human social realities, his concept of everyday life located the human being within the set of changeable and simultaneous processes that characterize human social life.

On the societal character of human life, Holzkamp wrote:

> When we say that humans, in contrast to all other living beings, must by virtue of their inner nature, be capable of socialization because they would otherwise be unable to develop into the societal life production process, and, accordingly, that with the historical emergence of the societal – economic life production for “societal nature” must have developed as the

> subjective side of the economy, that is only a postulate, albeit a reasonable one. (Holzkamp, 1991, pp. 52-53)

Holzkamp is sensitive to the need to consider the subjective side of human processes and realities, and though this subjective aspect of human processes is introduced in his definition of societal realities, he understood social-economic life production as being possible only through the subjective nature of these processes. His emphasis on the subjective side of human processes led to a new comprehension of the specific economic-social productive character of human beings. These attributes, taken together, defined the main qualitative distinction between animals and human beings. Holzkamp was very concerned to advance with respect to an ontological definition of human beings that clearly allows us to be differentiated from other living species.

Even though Holzkamp took an important step forward in considering the subjective side of socio-economic processes, he conceptualized those subjective processes related to societal life through the concept of collective subjectivity, the heuristic value of which is limited in treating social subjective processes. The concept of social subjectivity in our proposal integrates collective processes, moving forward in terms of social subjective processes and events that are not collective.

Holzkamp's collective subjectivity is closely related to the vagueness of his comprehension of subjectivity as such, on which we will focus below. Holzkamp said in this regard:

> On the side of societal relations, the psychoanalytic idea that these are solely limiting and repressing is overcome by elaborating the connection between the development of subjective quality of life and the individual's participation in societal control over the conditions of life, that is, by the integration of the individual and collective subjectivity. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 101)

Regardless of my critique of the concept of collective subjectivity, the fact of defining the subjective nature of social spaces, even if reduced to the collective, was an important step forward in transcending the individualistic view of subjectivity.

Holzkamp's later concept of *everyday life* complemented his definition of societal processes, highlighting the complex networks of activities and situations within which individuals are simultaneously involved in their social life. Dreier (2016) stresses the difference between situation and everyday life and, in my opinion, also turns this concept into a very important methodological device:

> The foundation for the formation of subjectivity and experience is her everyday life and not a situation. This insight expands our analytic gaze from an immediate situation to an everyday life that is going on from day to day in a particular, subjectively and socially grounded and arranged way. Furthermore, everyday life contains many different situations in different places and spheres of activity. So it is not adequate to analyze a subject's situation in the singular in general terms. Situations must be grasped in the plural as different across the diverse contexts of a subject's everyday life. (Dreier, 2016, p.17)

Dreier's call to center on everyday life as a cosmos of situations located in different places and within different networks of social relations, implies different subjective resources. It also implies that an individual's positions demand a system of highly malleable and dynamic concepts to advance on a new proposal on subjectivity capable of answering such a theoretical advance in the comprehension of social life. A theoretical proposal capable of fulfilling this requirement will be advanced below.

Most of the research done in psychology today, whether qualitative or quantitative, is still performed on the basis of episodic moments formally planned as part of the research process, separating the course of research from the flux of everyday life, within which participants in the research live, and within which the matter being researched occurs. We have given special attention to this fact in our most recent works related to our constructive-interpretative methodological proposal (González Rey, 2000, 2005; González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2016, 2017). We propose (Gonzalez Rey & Mitjans, 2017a,b) that the researcher should be "immersed" within the social arena within which the participants' activities and social relations are organized in their daily lives (Gonzalez Rey, Goulart & Bezerra, 2016; Gonzalez Rey & Mitjans, 2017 a, b).

Summarizing this topic, I think that Holzkamp advanced the positions of Soviet psychology and the way in which its legacy has been developed by Western psychology in relation to the following three points: (a) the relationship between individual and society, understanding societal processes as inseparable from subjectivity; (b) the inclusion of the subjective side of human experiences, whether social or individual; (c) the transcendence of the social determinism that has prevailed up until now in most of the theoretical positions within the so called cultural, historical and activity theory. Phenomenology and hermeneutics as two important traditions in the German philosophy also tangentially influenced his methodological proposal in comparison with the empirical experimentalism dominant in the official Soviet psychological trends.

Dialogue on subjectivity with Holzkamp's proposal

Subjectivity, as considered by me elsewhere (González Rey, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2014, 2015), is a departure from a new ontological definition of human processes as inseparable from culture, and is historically located, something that has a social existence. In fact, subjectivity was only specified as an ontological definition[1] by the modern philosophy of the subject, which identified subjectivity with consciousness and with rational individual productions. Since that time onward, the concept has been inappropriately used as synonymous with self, consciousness, inner psychical structure etc. Holzkamp highlighted subjectivity as a phenomenon; however, he did not advance a new ontological proposal about it from which a new theoretical system could emerge. His definition of subjectivity was constrained by some tendencies and concepts; nonetheless, he did not consider the important and promissory precedence within German psychology of the definition of dynamic units for the study of psyche, particularly the ideas advanced by T. Dembo, part of K. Lewin's team (Dembo, 1993).

Holzkamp treated subjectivity as one more psychological concept within the broad taxonomy of psychological concepts that he continued to use in his theoretical proposal. Moreover, Holzkamp's definition of subjectivity is also vague; he referred to some terms as having subjective significance, such as subjective situation, subjective necessity, subjective aspect of the action etc. Nonetheless, in any of these concepts it remains clear what the author understood by subjectivity.

Holzkamp explicitly defined human subjectivity "as the possibility of conscious control over one's own life conditions, always and necessarily moving beyond individuality toward participation in the collective determination of the societal processes" (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 58). There are many references by Holzkamp to "subjective" as an adjective, always complementing other concepts, such as emotions, action, motivation, but he never specified the meaning of "subjectivity". Subjectivity seems to be mainly represented by two specific and vaguely defined concepts – action potence and productive needs.

Through action potency Holzkamp seemed to be interested in advancing a broad concept capable of explaining an integral capacity of individuals to expand

[1] I use the ontological definition to define a specific quality of the phenomenon under study that becomes a new intelligible phenomenon, through a new theoretical construction that can be developed through research and professional practice, opening a new path toward intelligibility in one domain of knowledge. When one phenomenon does not specify its ontological nature, the concept used to specify it runs the risk of being distorted when attempting to theoretically reveal it through old-fashioned traditional concepts, through which the new ontological quality cannot be expressed.

themselves over obstacles to social development. However, its definition is highly undetermined. Holzkamp and his followers have described this concept mainly by its function.

> The surface appearances of individual courses of development that are ordinarily encountered can thus be analyzed in terms of the relationships they express between the generalized action potence and the developmental restrictions through which they are canalized and deformed. Thus it is necessary to understand not only social developmental obstacles by which action potency is concretely restricted, but also the subjective levels of mediation, modes of assimilation, and mechanism of defense by which the subjective necessity to control conditions appears in possibly unrecognizable, perverted ways. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 61)

The above quotation reveals the main gaps in, and imprecision of, the use of the term subjectivity by Holzkamp. The generalized action potence appears here to be a capacity to transcend social developmental obstacles, an important attribute to be considered by any new approach to the matter of subjectivity. In any case, it is not clear how the term action potence is defined, because here action potency appears separated from what he defines as subjective levels of mediation, which appear together with modes of assimilation and a mechanism of defense, a combination of concepts that is difficult to understand. At the same time, these concepts are understood as the way in which the necessity to control conditions appears. Is action potence a subjective formation in itself, or does subjectivity only appear through the concept introduced by Holzkamp? Once again, subjective appears here to be one side of other processes, but its nature is not specified.

The definition of action potence embodies the rational character oriented towards control, as characterized by Holzkamp's more general definition of subjectivity quoted above, in which consciousness and orientation are the two main functions of subjectivity, as is clearly revealed in the next statement: "Thus, generally speaking, the development of human subjectivity, as the possibility of conscious control over one's own life conditions, always and necessarily requires moving *beyond individuality* (stressed in the original) toward participation in the *collective determination* (stressed in the original) of the societal processes" (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 58).

The relevance of Holzkamp's contribution in not reducing subjectivity to an individual phenomenon becomes opaque due to this statement, from which an important doubt could arise about what Holzkamp defined as subjectivity; are individuals carriers of subjective processes, aside from the fact that they are

always engaged within social plots? We address this question in our definition of subjectivity, understanding levels of social and individual subjectivity which are reciprocally configured, one within the other, through the subjective senses that they each produce.

The vagueness of the definition of the concept of action potence is evident in the many different and non-precise attributes used by different authors in the definition of this concept. So Tolman, one of the important followers and interpreters of Holzkamp's work, states:

> The first implication yields one of Critical Psychology's more central categories, action potency (*Handlungsfähigkeit*). This is the focal category that embraces everything that has been said up to now. It reflects the need for psychology to consider the individual's ability to do the things that he or she feels are necessary to satisfy his or her needs; that is, to ensure an acceptable quality of life. It has a subjective side, which is how one feels about oneself and one's relation with the world… Action potency is what mediates individual reproduction and societal reproduction. (Tolman, 1991, p. 16)

The concept of action potence is represented for both Holzkamp and Tolman as an additive concept formed by different elements, modes and processes. Moreover, instead of being a main concept for Holzkamp's definition of subjectivity, subjectivity appears as an aspect of action potence. While in Holzkamp's definition, action potence seems to be a generative concept, capable of explaining how individuals transcend the objective social limitation of their development, Tolman presents the concept as a mediator between individual reproduction and societal reproduction. What does it mean to be a mediator in this case? Both definitions, as the reader can perceive, are different in some respects, stressing the vagueness of the concept, and together with this, the vagueness of Holzkamp's own definition of subjectivity.

As stated above, subjectivity is treated by Holzkamp as an aspect of other processes and functions without specifying its own nature. As a result, subjectivity, rather than a new qualitative and distinctive feature of human realties, is treated as one more concept within the fragmentary taxonomy of psychological concepts. Holzkamp continues to refer to cognition, emotion and motivation as three different processes, and his attempts to advance the unity between them falls into a rationalist reductionism.

The rationalism of Holzkamps definition of emotions is clearly expressed by Tolman:

> The critical psychological reconstruction of emotion revealed it as an essential component of the knowing processes. It orients knowledge by appraising environmental factors. It tells us when knowledge is adequate and when it is inadequate. Contrary to the traditional view, it is an adjunct to cognition, not its opponent. (Tolman, 1991, p. 20)

Several constraints could be pointed out due to this way of understanding emotion: (a) the preservation of the traditional split between cognitive processes and emotions, through the presentation of the latter as an "adjunct" to cognition, deriving from (b) how the emotions are presented as a secondary process oriented towards qualifying the adequacy of knowledge by appraising environmental factors. This definition of emotions corroborates Holzkamp's rationalistic and cognitivist reductionism in his treatment of emotions, and consequently of motivation and subjectivity.

In Holzkamp's own words:

> Whereas an adequate theoretical reconstruction of the connections between cognition, emotions, and action requires that we take negative emotional subjective states seriously as expressions of the unsatisfactoriness of objective living conditions, and emotionality must therefore be seen as serving as a subjective guide for the improvement of environmental relations. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 123)

Once again, subjectivity appears as complement, in this case as a function of emotionality as a "subjective guide". What does this mean? Are emotions not subjective productions? Holzkamp only understood emotions as serving rational purposes to define the adequacy or inadequacy of knowledge. Where is subjectivity in relation to these processes? While Holzkamp, at some points, appeared as a critic of the fragmentation of psychology, he in fact perpetuated the traditional fragmenting taxonomy of psychological concepts. The rationalism that is the basis of his attempt to explain psychological processes and subjectivity as consciously oriented toward control is evident in his treatment of emotions and motives. Rather than a theory capable of theoretically reconstructing the relation between cognition, emotions and action, what is necessary is a new comprehension of how emotions, cognition and actions are simultaneously configured with new concepts assembled within a new theoretical system, carrying on a new ontological definition of human mind. This is the only path through which it would be possible to overcome the fragmentary taxonomy of concepts that characterizes psychology today. Subjectivity, as understood by us, does not represent an addition of concepts nor their interrelations, but a system assembled through symbolic-emotional units, whose self-organization is in

process, and within which different functions and psychological processes appear as subjectively configured.

These gaps in the definition of emotions and motivations turn Holzkamp's definition of subjectivity into a partial and unclear term exhausted by its rational-adaptive character. This evaluation gains support in the following statement by Holzkamp-Osterkamp: "The neglect of subjectivity (the authors are referring here to Pribram's theory of emotion), that is, the concrete meaning of objective environmental conditions for the individual, is expressed by the fact that it is not the goal and their subjective meanings that are taken to be at issue, but the plan alone" (Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1991, p. 117).

This rational orientation of Holzkamp's theory is criticized by Teo in the following terms:

> However, I suggest that Holzkamp provided only a first-order solution to the relationship between society and the individual, and, more importantly, that he provided only a partial solution to the problem of how critical psychology should consider the mediation between social structure and the conduct of everyday life… By a partial solution I refer to a program that draws on local traditions that are embedded in philosophies of consciousness without an awareness of critical traditions focusing on the body. In suggesting adding body-based critical concepts, I imply that Holzkamp's (1983) critical psychology is a progressive research program that is able to assimilate and accommodate critical traditions from inside and outside the West, and that psychologists need to "move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp." (Teo, 2016, p. 112)

Teo's comments are important, not only because of the critical points he raises with respect to Holzkamp, but also because of the way he made his criticism and the positivity he stressed in relation to Holzkamp's proposal. Today, it is important not only to "move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp" but to "move with Foucault beyond Foucault" and to "move with Vygotsky beyond Vygotsky" etc. Teo postulates an interesting principle that must guide our relation to theory, recognizing its values and limits. The best theories are those which bring to light new theoretical representations of the subject under study, and that also allow progress on scientific research and social practices, as inseparable from stages in their continuous development.

Moreover, Teo pointed out two important ideas: first, the need to transcend the approaches based on the philosophy of consciousness, which was preserved by Holzkamp in his approach to subjectivity; and second, the understanding of Holzkamp's proposal as a progressive program. Theories are not closed systems, but progressive long-lasting programs that should be continuously developed. In

one of our more recent works, we have identified this need through the concept of lines of research (González Rey & Mitjans, 2017a, 2017b).

The rationalism of Holzkamp's theoretical proposal is also expressed by some of his closer followers and interpreters. Thus, for example, Brockmeier claims:

> Subjectivity, intentions, agency, participation, decision-making, action possibilities, reasons for action and *Handlungsfähigkeit* are all terms that belong to what Rom Harre (1995) has described as "agentive discourse". For Harre the study of human agency cannot be separated from the study of the language of agency, that is, "the discursive practices in which our agentive power are manifested or, to put it more candidly, in which we present ourselves as agents" (p.112). (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 224)

Brockmeier's proposal to reduce that broad range of concepts to an "agentive discourse" reduces discourse, and terms related to it, to concepts monopolizing the ontological domain of psychology. This proposal deviates, in my view, from Holzkamp's legacy. The relevance of discourse as a symbolical socially constructed process, the heuristic value of which allows a transcending of the individualistic-behavioral natural psychology, was that it was very seductive to critical psychologists, many of whom, at some stage, transformed discourse into a new metaphysical definition (Edward &Potter, 1992; Harre, 1995; Gergen, 1982, 1985; Shotter, 1993, 1995). Language, dialogue and discourse become the only ontological domain from which an alternative critical psychology could be constructed. New terms highlighted this new ontological domain, such as dialogical self, agentive discourse, discursive practices and deconstruction, among others. Subjectivity, at some stage, was completely banned from the psychological arena, as along with emotions and the active character of individuals and social instances as agents and subjects.

As a result of the overwhelming impact of the "discursive turn" in psychology, many psychologists question the existence of psychology itself as a domain of knowledge (Rose, Gergen), without reflecting that a different psychology is possible, one that does not center on the individual psyche as such, but on a new ontological definition capable of explaining human phenomena, whether social or individual, in new terms, departing from concepts that have characterized human realities as cultural, social and historical. One possible attempt at defining a new ontological domain, one capable of integrating social symbolical constructions and individuals and treating both as configured within the other instead of being engulfed by the other, is to reframe subjectivity from a cultural, social and historical standpoint.

Drawing a new picture of subjectivity from a cultural-historical psychology

On the basis of the appeal that has, for some decades, enchanted critical psychologists, many of whom have been involved in one way or another with social constructionism, discourse is looked on as the cornerstone for a new psychology capable of transcending the individualism, naturalism and empirical character of psychology. The theory outlined below has been discussed in detail in some of our more recent works (González Rey, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; González Rey & Mitjans, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Our aim in this paper is to focus on our differences and agreements with Holzkamp's proposal and to extend this more recent work as a new option to explain a non-empirical, non-individualistic, non-naturalistic way of doing psychology that does not have discourse as its epicenter. Holzkamp, aside from the differences outlined above, is an important antecedent to our position due to the integrative character of his theory, which attempted to break down the fragmentation of psychology and attend to the new epistemological requirements that such an attempt demanded (Teo, 1998). Together with this, instead of rejecting psychology, he proposed a new kind of psychology, exactly as we have done. Unlike discourse and language, subjectivity, in our cultural-historical proposal, advanced a new comprehension of emotions, which appears to characterize subjective phenomena and form new qualitative units, within which emotions and symbolical processes are integrated into a new qualitative unit, representing a new ontological domain – subjectivity. Unlike Holzkamp's treatment of the emotions, in our definition of subjectivity emotions have a generative character; the units of emotions and symbolical processes were coined by us as subjective senses (González Rey, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2014, 2015). Emotions, according to this definition, transcend their adaptive and control functions, oriented towards defining cognitive and other processes, which are traditionally defined as psychological, as subjectively configured processes, which appear simultaneously to be emotional and symbolical. In subjective senses, emotions and symbolical processes are two sides of the same coin; emotion obtains symbolic character, and symbolic processes appear through emotions.

Subjective senses form an endless and fluid dynamic within which one sense unfolds into others, in a process within which subjective configurations emerge. Subjective configurations always result from dominant subjective senses that have become integrated within new qualitative units, not as a sum, but as a new subjective unit capable of generating subjective senses, as new subjective productions that are not directly related to the objective facts that characterize experience. Behaviors are always subjectively configured and they are often

surprisingly perceived as completely unjustified by the concrete scene within which they emerge. Subjective configurations are never a direct expression of objective conditions; they always represent imaginary subjective productions. This is what defines the generative character of subjectivity in our proposal. Emotions are a cornerstone of the main function of subjectivity, the way in which individuals and social instances engage as motivational and social agents in their lived experiences. Whereas individual traditional psychology is based on concepts strictly restricted to individuals' behaviors, motivations and other psychological processes, subjectivity highlights how the constellation of socio-cultural symbolical productions, including discourses, institutional orders, languages, socially coined processes like race, gender, age and illness, are lived by individuals and social instances through the subjective senses generated and developed by the subjective configurations of different events and experiences. I defined this complex relation as follows:

> Any social experience becomes subjective through the emergence of subjective senses, which represent a subjective side of any living experience. Subjective senses always carry out an imaginary character. They do not reflect objective processes of experience; they are individual and social productions based on how social symbolic constructions are experienced by individuals, groups and institutions. (González Rey, 2017, p. 29)

Subjective senses, unlike meanings, allow the recognition of the generative character of emotions which, like subjective senses, always evoke symbolical processes that do not reduce to meanings. Meaning, as used by Bruner, Holzkamp and some of his disciples, such as Brockmeier, is embedded within a package of rational functions that overlook emotions. Arguing about meanings, Brockemeier wrote: "At least in principle, we can detach ourselves from meanings; we can step back and consider them, think about them, evaluate them, take a conscious and reflexive stance towards them" (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 222).

Different from meanings, subjective senses are not available to be grasped from conscious and intentional actions. Subjective senses appear indirectly through the ways in which individuals and social agencies organize and structure their speech, dialogues, performances, and even through the way in which daily routines are performed. The emotional engagements of all of these expressions do not specify themselves as pure emotional expressions, but through the more general way in which individual and social instances spontaneously express themselves in relation to their different experiences, and to the times and areas in which they have occurred. So, for example, it is not the same that a person tells of experiences related to their father, remembering times shared together through

personalized constructions, as to describe the father by his personal qualities without any personalized reference. This meaning, generated in specific and indirect ways to qualify personal or social expressions, is what is coined as an indicator in our methodological proposal; indicators are hypothetical meanings attributed by the researcher to indirect elements that are not consciously constructed through explicit meanings.

Subjective senses are not rationally and consciously identified meanings. On the contrary, subjective senses are taken as subjective productions that are embedded in the form of human thoughts, gestures and performances, but that are never directly explicit in the meanings or action through which these experiences appear. This is the reason why prejudices and "rational orders" are subjective productions rather than rational ones. They can never be recognizable by the rational arguments used to defend them. This subjective condition, to some extent, allows an explanation of why "rational" human beings have committed atrocities on behalf of reason since humankind has existed as such.

This subordination of reason to subjective plots was identified by Freud in his concepts of transference and rationalization. Rationalization is not a mechanism of defense; it reveals the subjective nature of any human construction. All human principles and institutions exist as subjective orders whose functioning is beyond the reasons for which those principles and institutions are explicitly founded. This is a point raised by Castoriadis through his definition of the social imaginary.

On the basis of the malleability and fluid character of subjective senses and subjective configurations, it is possible to understand subjectivity as a quality of human phenomena, whether social or individual, moving forward on the topic of the human mind. Subjective senses and subjective configuration are subjective productions that do not result from immediate and objective external influences. Subjective senses emerge within different plots of human social relations as a result of the subjective configurations that emerge from the ongoing activities and performances around which these plots are simultaneously organized. These subjective senses embody the social symbol constructions that characterize those social arenas as they are subjectively experienced by individuals and groups.

Our proposal on subjectivity is dialogical, understanding dialogue as a shared social configuration that is inseparable from the agents or subjects in dialogue. Dialogue is not only inter-subjective; it is a social subjective configured process that creates a space for social subjectivity shared by its participants. At the same time, the actions and the singular subjective configurations of the participants appear as subjective senses generated by the subjective configuration of the dialogue. Both individuals and dialogue are configured, one within the other, through subjective senses, which, embodying

the other level of subjectivity, are themselves produced by the subjective configurations generated by each of these subjectivities**.** Dialogue cannot be separated as subjective production from the agents involved in this process, as has been proposed by social constructionism (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Gergen, 1982, 1991; Harre, 1995; Shotter, 1993, 1995).

Subjectivity opens new paths towards topics that have remained under a shadow in psychology for the last two decades, topics such as emotions, taken in its generative and foundational character, motivation and individuals as subjects and agents of social processes. For discursive psychologies, human motivation is overlooked, and all human processes are explained by discursive and dialogical devices. Subjectivity is mainly a motivational system (González Rey, 2014), the functioning of which occurs through subjective configurations of human experiences. Only as subjectively configured processes do social realities and experiences have the capacity to engage individuals and groups as motivated and active actors. Overlooking subjectivity in the explanation of social processes has historically led to the exclusion of individuals, as if they could not be part of social realities, and also to the ignoring of social realities as also being subjective by their own nature.

Subjectivity and individuals are inseparable from social processes, as has been defended in classical sociology, such as by M. Weber, N. Elias and Alan Touraine, among others. More recently, the topic of subjectivity as a constituent of social realities has been brought to light in other areas of the social sciences. M.J. Graham, a professor of social work, has stated: “What we see and understand in a situation is influenced by our “subjectivity”, including our embodiment – for example, gender, ethnicity, social location, age, sexual orientation and ability” (Graham, 2017, p. 4). Regardless that subjectivity appears between quotation marks, the author has to appeal to the term to explain how different social symbolical constructions are simultaneously present in our actions. There is not another concept in psychology capable of explaining this as a singular process that includes our embodiment; embodiment is always a subjective process, while emotions are the link between body and subjectivity.

Nonetheless, those social attributes enumerated by Graham are not present in a standardized way in every person or social group. They will appear as subjective senses that express the singular way in which those attributes are produced by individuals and groups within the complex plot of their everyday lives. Social symbolical constructions are not internalized; they are subjectively produced by individuals and groups in a singular way. The attempt to draw internal, properly individual subjective processes as simple echoes of other processes is clear, such as that embodied by the concept of a “dialogical self”; the self could never be exhausted by dialogical processes.

The definition of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint, as defended in this paper, allows the body to be considered as being part of subjective productions. Our body is subjective and our subjectivity is embodiment. The body is a permanent source of sensations, emotions and states that appear as subjective senses within subjective configurations. The subjective configurations are temporally and locally situated, and our body is part of the sense of being in the world from a given place.

The way that body appears as a subjective process does not differ from the way in which other social symbolic constructions also appear as subjective. Even Merleau-Ponty, who very seriously advanced the idea of the incarnate subject in philosophy, recognized that the body is inseparable from many other social facts for the comprehension of individuals and society. The fact of the matter here is to advance toward a new ontological definition of human phenomena that makes possible the integration of those multiple social facts and the body as inseparable within a new theoretical system. In our opinion, this is one of the challenges which a theory of subjectivity with new theoretical bases should answer.

Merleau-Ponty (1964) reveals one of the relevant challenges that must be faced by the study of subjectivity from a cultural-historical point of view; the way in which the diverse and simultaneous facts and processes of social life become a subjective production, qualitatively different from the processes involved in its genesis. Two main ideas are stressed by Merleau-Ponty. The first has to do with the importance of psychological and social theories not reducing their subjects to a single fact taken as determinant of human phenomena in whatever domain of human life; the second is the emphasis on the contradictory character of human and social functioning, complex systems that never reach equilibrium.

Holzkamp took an important step forward in considering subjectivity as part of individuals and social phenomena, drawing a non-reductionist picture of subjectivity as a human phenomenon. Nonetheless, he did not advance a theory of subjectivity, in part due to his rationalistic representation of human beings.

Some final remarks

It is difficult to understand why Holzkamp's proposal has, in fact, been restricted to a relatively small group of authors that have identified themselves with the critical psychology proposed by him. However, neither critical social psychology, as it has developed in the last three decades, nor the historic cultural approach inspired by the legacy of Soviet psychology in the West, have been, in fact, interested in Holzkamp's proposal. In my opinion, the disregard of

Holzkamp's proposal results from two very interrelated facts. For critical social psychology, mainly inspired by the legacy of post-structuralism, the active role attributed by Holzkamp to individuals and subjectivity does not appear attractive, whereas for the latter, enclosed in a narrow definition of what cultural-historical psychology means, neither Holzkamp's ideas on subjectivity and subject, nor his criticisms of Marxism and the Soviet authors, are acceptable. The "progressive research program", as it was qualified by T. Thomas, was one more reason for the rejection of Holzkamp's position by a psychology mainly oriented by theories in fashion.

No matter its historical relevance, this paper moves beyond Holzkamp on the topic of subjectivity, advancing a proposal that shares Holzkamp's position of a non-deterministic approach to subjectivity, but that differs from his proposal by making explicit an ontological definition of subjectivity, on which a new theory of subjectivity stands. This ontological definition is based on the understanding of the human phenomenon as a unit formed by symbolical processes and emotions, within which one evokes the other without being its cause. This formulation of subjectivity has challenged simplistic formulations of homogenous ethical, gender or whatever socially constructed realities as determined human behaviors. It is not these constructions in themselves, nor the discourses on individuals and social behaviors, but the subjective senses configured by individuals and social instances living such experiences, which would define the way those social symbolical constructions will be experienced by individuals and social institutions.

The units of subjectivity, as a theoretical system, are the subjective senses and subjective configurations, cultural, social and historical character of which is given because of their capacity, as a system, to define the singular way that individuals and groups experience their cultural and social realities, historically located. The culture and its symbolic systems are not a direct trigger of human actions; actions are subjectively configured within subjective systems, whether social or individuals. The redefinition of emotions as inseparable from subjective processes, leads to their generative and active character, which has been completely ignored by rationalistic approaches in psychology.

Subjectivity, as discussed in this paper, transcends the fragmentary taxonomy of categories on which psychology has historically been developed as a field of knowledge. At a subjective level, the different psychological processes and functions appear as subjectively configured processes, becoming the motive for their own operations. Motivation is understood as the subjective configurations of different psychological functions, experiences, performances and activities. It is through the subjective configurations of social and individual subjectivity that each of them is configured into the other, making possible social

changes through individual subjective engagements in social events and processes. Without individual and social subjective engagements, change does not occur. This is one of the richer aspects of Holzkamp's legacy, from which we intend to continue advancing our proposal on subjectivity.

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