

ADVANCING FURTHER THE HISTORY OF SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY: Moving Forward From Dominant Representations in Western and Soviet Psychology

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This article discusses the works of some Soviet scholars of psychology, their theoretical positions, and the times within which their works were developed. Dominant representations of Soviet psychology and some of the main Soviet authors are revisited in the light of a blending of facts actively associated with their emergence in both Soviet and Western psychology. From the beginning, Soviet psychology was founded upon Marxism. However, the ways by which that psychology pretended to become Marxist in its philosophical basis were diverse and often contradictory. Other philosophical and theoretical positions also influenced Soviet psychologists. Different moments of that contradictory process are discussed in this article, and through this, I bring to light their interrelations and the consequences for the development of Soviet psychology. This article reinterprets several myths found within Soviet psychology, in which different theoretical representations have become institutionalized for long periods in both Soviet and Western psychology. Particular attention is given to identifying the conditions that presented Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev as part of the same paradigm, and which paved the way for a perception of Leontiev and his group as paralleling Vygotsky's importance among American psychologists. Many of the sources that are used in this article were published in Soviet psychology only after the 1970s. Unlike the different and interesting works that began to appear on diverse trends in Soviet psychology, this article details in depth the articulation of topics and questions that still now are presented as different chapters in the analysis of Soviet psychology.

Keywords: Soviet psychology, cultural-historical approach, activity theory, consciousness, idealistic Russian psychology

This article aims to advance the representation of Soviet psychology as has prevailed in the West. This representation also corresponds with what has dominated Soviet psychology. Some theoretical positions and authors have monopolized the political situation, gaining unjustified recognition during different historical periods in psychology. The growing number of publications, both in Russia and in the West, has suffered distortion, resulting from censorship, and this situation allows us, at this moment, to raise new interpretations of Soviet psychology as well as its main protagonists.

To achieve this purpose, we begin with the manner by which Soviet psychology began to be known in the United States, due to the relevance of American interpretations and publication of the reception of Vygotsky and Soviet psychology all over the world. We deal further with the moments, facts, and authors of that psychology, and their interrelations, which permit new interpretations of Soviet psychology. We also discuss theoretical and methodological facts and authors, which have remained in shadow or have been little discussed for decades in both Soviet and Western psychology.

We draw attention to those chronological moments that we consider relevant, where we consider the facts for each historical moment, without any pretension, in order to turn them into the best periodization for psychology. In our divisions, we focus on discussions, events,

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and figures, which are closely related to some qualitative moments and ruptures within Soviet psychology. Due to the difficult historical and institutional contexts within which that psychology developed, the changes, contradictions, and heterogeneity deserve careful attention.

Putting aside the political pressures that impacted on Soviet psychology, this article will discuss in depth two moments that particularly impacted on the path taken by Soviet psychology. The first is related to the elimination of idealistic philosophers and psychologists who played an important role in the advent of that psychology, a fact that has been completely omitted from that history and from its interpretations. The second concerns the peak of the political pressures on psychology that took place at the end of the 1940s as result of the purges within Soviet science, propelled by the accusations raised by Lysenko against bourgeois deviation in Soviet genetics. As a result of that period, for the first time in its history, an official Marxist psychology was imposed based on Pavlov's doctrine.

After a discussion of those historical moments, this article discusses in depth the post-Stalinist moment in Soviet psychology, which preserves the idea of identifying Marxist psychology by its objectivity. After Stalin's death, as the Pavlovian physiological reductionism that was officially imposed for a short period during the 1950s was overcome, a turning point took place. Here the focus was on object-based activity, in which concrete objects became the essence of the definition for a Marxist Soviet psychology. The rise and fall of activity theory is discussed within this complex network of psychological theory in both moments.

Representation of Soviet Psychology and Vygotsky in the West

The first works devoted to Russian psychology in English were published at the beginning of the 20th century. The best-known figure then was Pavlov, who was the first Russian author to be published in English in the first half of the 20th century. As Pavlov's studies centered on conditioned reflexes, little confusion exists in its identification as reflexology. "Reflexology" was a term developed by Bekhterev, another great figure of Russian neurophysiology, with the explicit proposal of replacing psychology in the

explanation of human behavior. The mistaken identification of Pavlov with reflexology extended until relative recently. Bruner (1995), one of the pioneers in the American-Soviet relationships in the 1960s, stated, "When Stalin took power in 1925, Congresses were called to bring things into line with Marxist doctrine, including one to bring psychology and the brain sciences into line with Marxism generally and "Pavlov" particularly" (p. 76).

If a well-informed psychologist like Bruner expressed such an idea, it meant that it was not an isolated position, but a shared social representation on Soviet psychology that remained alive in the West until the 1990s. Until the 1970s, publications of Soviet psychologists were scarce in English, and they appeared without historical contextualization. According to Luria, the strongest line in Russian psychology in the 1920s was Kornilov's reactology and not Pavlov's theoretical position (Luria, 1928). Luria was a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* at that time, and he opened the path through which two of his colleagues, Vygotsky and Leontiev, also published articles in that journal in 1929 and 1932, respectively (A. N. Leontiev, 1932; Vygotsky, 1929). Despite these early publications in English, the authors did not greatly impact American psychologists because of the absence of references for following these positions.

Between 1930 and 1960, apart from the previously referred to articles, Soviet psychologists remained relatively unknown in their original works, and to get information, Americans depended on authors who understood Russian (Cole, 1963). This situation explains the small interest in Soviet psychology in the United States at that time. At the beginning of the 1960s, Bruner, already a well-known psychologist, began an increasing stream of correspondence with Luria, as a result of which Bruner made his first visit to Moscow. Through Luria, he mainly was in contact with the Department of Psychology of the Moscow State University, headed by Leontiev.¹ These exchanges between Bruner and Luria and Leontiev opened the way

¹ The information about the first visit of Bruner to Moscow was taken from the interview of Audrey Amrein-Beardsley with Bruner, accessed by the author through the site <http://www.insidetheacademy.asu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/transcriptBruner.pdf>

for an increasing curiosity about Soviet psychology among psychologists who were close to Bruner. As a result of that first visit to Moscow, Bruner stated, “I found these young Russian scholars in cognitive science, who were battling against Pavlov in much the same way I had been battling against the Skinnerian approach” (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012, p. 5).

Bruner’s first impressions represented the advent of a new representation of Soviet psychology in the United States. As evident from the previously quoted statement by Bruner, this new representation was primarily modeled through Leontiev and his close circle of followers, whose positions were taken by Bruner through his own cognitive lenses that represented a subversion of the dominant Skinnerian positions. Bruner’s first impressions about Soviet psychology were as follows:

Meanwhile—the most ironic twist of all—the Second Signal System provided Vygotsky followers in the latter of 1930s (principally Luria, Leontiev, Sokolov and Zinchenko; Vygotsky having died of tuberculosis in 1934) with just the ideological umbrella they needed to bring the cultural-historical in out of the rain. This was the time of “the battle of consciousness” in the late 1940s and 1950s. (Bruner, 1995, p. 78)

Bruner mistakenly presented the group of Leontiev as fighters of the “battle of consciousness,” a term that, at that time, was reduced by that group to a mere epiphenomenon of the concrete external practical operations with material objects.

In 1962, Michael Cole, a young American psychologist interested in cultural psychology, spent 1 year as a postdoctoral student of Luria at Moscow State University. Cole also shared the representation of Bruner, which, incidentally, benefited Luria and Leontiev so much; they embodied for American psychologists the symbolic value of having been fighters for a new psychology, of which Vygotsky was the pioneer. The capitalization of such a symbolic legacy was an unparalleled source of prestige for that group, which was one of the reasons for its popularity in Western countries. Important parts of the history between Leontiev, Luria, and Vygotsky had not yet been published in Russian in those years. When the first volume of Vygotsky’s work, *Thinking and Speech*, was published in English (in 1962), it had minimal impact on American psychology. According to Glick (2011), after that publication, Piaget con-

tinued to monopolize the references of American psychology in education and child development.

Vygotsky’s popularity in the West owed more to *Mind in Society* than to the English edition of *Thinking and Speech*. *Mind in Society* was edited by a group of authors (Cole, Steiner, Scribner, & Soubberman, 1978). This book was the more relevant reference to Vygotsky in the West for decades since that moment.

Before the publication of *Mind in Society*, the book *A Handbook of Contemporary Soviet Psychology*, edited by Cole and Maltzan, was published in 1969 after Cole’s return from Moscow. The foreword was written by Leontiev, Luria, and Smirnov. Interest in Soviet psychology grew quickly at the beginning of 1970s as a result of the points of convergence between Soviet psychology and a group of American psychologists with its much-heralded cognitive revolution, in which Bruner was at the forefront. As a result of all these processes in the 1960s and 1970s, *Mind in Society* had a high impact.

The label “cultural-historical activity theory” was still not formulated in those years, but the way Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria appeared as being part of the same theoretical movement was a strong premise for that definition. In the 1980s, Vygotsky became a celebrity in Western psychology, and many works were devoted to his theoretical similarities with authors such as Mead, Dewey, and Bartlett, on which a new psychology began in the United States. The picture of Vygotsky given by American authors was drawn through the lenses of his interpreters. In 1985, Wertsch published *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*, making a notable contribution to the interpretation on the process of Vygotsky that advanced as a result of the previously mentioned events.

The weight given to the instrumentalism in certain moments of Vygotsky’s theory was a strong point in identifying Vygotsky with pragmatism. Bruner’s (1985) next claim was his remark on reading Vygotsky in relation to instrumentalism: “To begin with, I liked his instrumentalism. That is to say, I admired his way of interpreting thought and speech as instruments for the planning and carrying out of the action” (p. 23).

The censorship and the priorities given by the different groups of power, which monopolized Soviet psychology at different moments of its

history, did not permit following the chronological order of the writing of the psychological publications by Vygotsky. Many of Vygotsky's works remained in the family archives until the 1980s, when his *Selected Works* were first published in Russian. The same happened to many other authors, many of whom have never been translated to English, such as Shpet, Chelpanov, Ananiev, Miasichev, and Abuljanova.

From the beginning, the American interpretations of Vygotsky treated Leontiev and Luria as the followers who further advanced this legacy. In the 1980s and the 1990s, Vygotsky's formulation of the cultural-historical approach turned into a sociocultural psychology. This term was used in important references to Vygotskian studies in the 1990s (see Bruner, 1995). In the 1990s, Cole advanced the discussion of a cultural psychology (Cole, 1998; Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2010).

More recently, Cole and Wertsch (2011) stated, in relation to their appropriation of the ideas of Zinchenko, something that, in my opinion, is valid for characterizing the general interpretation of Soviet psychologists by American authors: "Clearly, many factors can legitimately be invoked to explain our limited understanding of Vladimir Petrovich's ideas. Our own limited scholarly background makes it difficult to follow the details needed to interpret research in seemingly quite separate, specialized, cultural domains" (p. 6).

In the 1980s, however, the term "activity theory" gained particular relevance among European authors—thus was created the International Society for Cultural Research on Activity Theory in 1986 (Engestrom, Jantzen, Ruckriem, Hedegaard, and Veggeti, among others). The society published the *Multidisciplinary Newsletter for Activity Theory* as its official organ. From the end of the 1990s, however, activity theory began to be more associated with the cultural-historical approach in what turned into the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which is the more commonly used term nowadays in the West to refer to Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev.

Despite the effort made by publications such as *Soviet Psychology* and the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* to bring into light different Soviet authors, the dominant representation equating Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria as the main representatives of Soviet psy-

chology became a strong barrier for the discussion of new ideas within the circles of Vygotskian studies. More recently, very interesting articles from the old and new generations of Russian psychologists have been published in the *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*.

Important works have been recently published in Russia and in the West that have highlighted new paths within this tradition (Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Bakhurst, 2007; Brusulinsky, 2001, 2002; Chudnovsky, 2006, 2009; Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2010; Cole & Wertsch, 2011; Daniels, 2012; Davydov, 2002; González Rey, 2009, 2011; Koshmanova, 2007; Kudriavtsev, 2006; A. A. Leontiev, 1992, 2001; Orlov, 2003; Vassilieva, 2010; Yarochevsky, 2007; Yasnitsky, 2009, 2010, 2012; Zinchenko, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2007). The one-sided interpretations and omissions with regard to Soviet psychology did not occur exclusively in Western psychology but also in Soviet psychology (Zavershneva, 2009; Zavershneva & Osipov, 2010).

On the basis of the previously mentioned facts, there is no doubt that a new beginning in the interpretation of Soviet psychology is taking place, as a result of which the interpretation of its history will be transformed, and many of the concepts and issues identified as its theoretical pillars will be revisited.

My presentation of Soviet psychology here does not intend to be complete, which is impossible in any historical study. My main aim is to present some of the moments, authors, and facts in their interrelation and theoretical unfolding, in an attempt to focus on new interpretations of Soviet psychology and some of its authors. This article ignores any congruent and monolithic version of the facts under analysis in an effort to demystify a few of the established "correct interpretations" of that history and its protagonists. Soviet psychology was a living movement and, as such, was full of contradictions, of which different interpretations are possible.

Because of the complexity of the matter, this article begins by presenting key topics in Soviet psychology at different historical moments, several of which remained concealed for a long time, owing to political repression and theoretical disputes within psychology. A historical interpretation should not be considered solely in relation to real historical facts; every historical

interpretation is part of a more complex paradigm through which some phenomena gain more visibility over others.

The Fight to Define a Marxist Psychology: The 1920s and Its Relevance for the Ulterior Paths of Soviet Psychology

Although the Russian Revolution had exerted increased repression from its beginning, a fact expressed very early in the repression of the sailors' uprising in Kronstad, the Russian Revolution also represented, at the beginning, a time of creation in the more diverse areas of social life. Psychology was no exception. Until the middle of the 1920s, the development of psychology represented a very rich and pluralistic period, within which polemics actively arose as a result of the active search for a Marxist psychology. From the beginning of the 1920s, idealistic positions in psychology began to lead to an ideological connotation. However, idealistic scientists, who contributed to the advancement of Russian psychology from the end of the 19th century, continued to freely defend their points of view during the first years after the revolution.

The influence of neurophysiology and of idealistic philosophy represented the main two poles of influence on Soviet psychology until the middle of the 1920s. Despite his relevance for psychology in Russia and abroad, Pavlov was not a psychologist and never intended to be. Reflexology, proposed by Bekhterev, emerged as an alternative to psychology as a discipline. Bekhterev inaugurated the Institute of Petrograd for the Study of Brain and Psychical Activity, where he was surrounded by a group of disciples, some of whom were psychologists who would become relevant in the coming years, such as Lazursky, Ananiev, and Miasichev.

The influence of Russian idealistic philosophy on psychology was suppressed in Soviet psychology from the first half of the 1920s up to the 1980s. The first chairs of psychology within departments of philosophy were ruled by idealistic theoretical positions, and appeared simultaneously in the universities of Moscow and Leningrad in 1863 (Budilova, 1983). Among the idealistic philosophers devoted to teaching psychology was M. M. Troitski, who occupied the chair of psychology at the University of Moscow. According to Budilova, "his doctoral

thesis was the first Russian psychological work in carrying out a historical character" (p. 19). The Russian idealistic philosophers were the first to stress culture as the basis for understanding the development of human consciousness.

The idealistic philosopher Chelpanov founded the Institute of Psychology of the State University of Moscow, which was officially inaugurated in 1914. Some other psychologists, who later became outstanding Soviet psychologists, such as Blonsky and Kornilov, were his disciples at that time. Chelpanov invited his disciple and collaborator, Gustav Shpet, one of the more brilliant Russian psychologists, to join him in the Institute of Psychology from the very beginning.

In 1920, Shpet organized the Department of Ethnical Psychology. This was an important step toward organically integrating culture into the teaching of psychology. According to Zinchenko (2007), "Vygotsky was Shpet's student at the Shanyavsky People's University, and he attended Shpet's seminars for two years" (p. 212). Because of these idealistic authors, topics on culture, language, and consciousness became relevant to Soviet psychology some years later, particularly in Vygotsky's work.

At the beginning of the 1920s, reflexology and psychology advanced in parallel in Petrograd and Moscow. However, the idealistic basis on which psychology advanced in Moscow was led by Chelpanov, who found strong resistance from his own disciples, mainly Kornilov and Blonsky. The Kornilov–Chelpanov polemic had its peak during the First Russian Congress of Psycho Neurology, held in 1923, when Kornilov strongly defended the need to advance further on the definition of a Marxist psychology. After the congress, Chelpanov was replaced by Kornilov as the director of the Institute of Psychology. Kornilov gained political and institutional space in early Soviet psychology. He founded reactology, which, unlike reflexology, focused on external influences as the basis of behavior. Luria and Leontiev were part of Kornilov's group at that time. One year later, Vygotsky joined that group by invitation of Kornilov.

Luria (1928) commented on Soviet psychology at that time as follows:

The psychologists as a rule share the objective positions of physiologists but carry on their work on a

much broader basis, approaching psychology from the point of view of that structural behavior which is determined by social conditions. To that wing belong most of the Russian psychologists who do not accept the mechanistic point of view of the reflexologists. It will suffice in this connection to mention the names of Professor Kornilov, Professor Blonski (his psychological work is of a distinctly genetic character), Professor Basov and L. S. Vygotsky. (p. 347)

Note that Luria did not mention Leontiev, who was at the Institute before Vygotsky. Luria's high opinion of Vygotsky can be determined here, because he had only been a member of the laboratory for 4 years. The quotation makes clear that behavior is understood within a stimulus–reaction scheme, which was similar to that defended by behaviorism at the same time. After the mysterious death of Bekhterev in 1927, the institutional and political power of reflexology began to decrease in the Soviet Union, whereas Kornilov and his group gained increasing relevance.

The divergences, opening discussions, and different orientations that characterized Soviet psychology during the first half of the 1920s began to change in the second half of that decade when idealistic representatives of psychology were excluded from Soviet psychology. The theoretical objective position defended by Kornilov, within which the social appeared to be identified as an external stimulus, was the beginning of an objective psychology ruled by a social determinism of behavior as synonymous with Marxist psychology. Kornilov's position influenced his younger collaborators, a mark that was present in certain moments of Vygotsky's work and that came to characterize and dominate Leontiev's conception of activity theory. This influence is clear in the following statement by Vygotsky (1995):

It is true that the sign in the beginning is a means of communication and only later becomes a means of *personal behavior*, it is completely evident that cultural development, based on the use of signs and the sign's inclusion in the general *system of behavior* initially takes place in a social, external way. . . . The primary psychology of the function of the word is a social psychology and if we want to know how the word *functions in individual behavior*, we should analyze, first and foremost, its prior function in the *social behavior* of the person. (p. 147; emphasis added)

The frequency with which the word “behavior” is used in the quotation shows the relevance

given to that concept, whether social or individual.

Nevertheless, Vygotsky's thought was more contradictory and creative than that of his fellows within Kornilov's group, due, to a large extent, to Vygotsky's rich cultural, philosophical, and psychological background. Among Vygotsky's theoretical influences, that of his professor and later colleague, Shpet, deserves special attention. Shpet seemed to be the main theoretical influence in Vygotsky's representation of psychology. Shpet's name has been brought to light only very recently (Zavialov, 2009; Zinchenko, 2002, 2007, 2009). As Zinchenko (2007) stated,

Despite all these connections, there is only one reference to Shpet in Vygotsky's works (in the *Psychology of Art*), and even this is only in passing. And Shpet's books *Phenomenon and Meaning* (1914), *Aesthetic Fragments* (1922), and *The Inner Form of Word* (1927), in which he discussed thinking and language, thought and word, meaning and sense and external and the inner form of a word were all published significantly earlier than Vygotsky's *Thinking and Speech* (1934). (p. 212)

The link between Shpet and Vygotsky has been largely ignored in Soviet and Western representations of Vygotsky's thought. This link represents a historical fact and is also a very important theoretical point that reflects the roots of Vygotsky's thought. This can be associated with his advancing positions at the end of his life in relation to that period defined by his followers as “cultural-historical theory” (González Rey, 2011; A. A. Leontiev, 1992; Miller, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2012). The historical facts and events involved in that change remained unknown. However, it is a very curious fact that Rubinstein invited Vygotsky to teach at Herten's Pedagogical Institute, whereas the latter's followers remained in Kharkov.

Toward the end of the 1920s and the beginning of 1930, a new theoretical representation was in the process in Soviet psychology, particularly through Vygotsky's and Rubinstein's publications. It seems as if these authors, by different ways, attempted to go beyond the prevailing interpretation of Marxist psychology as an objective psychology grounded in behavior. Rubinstein (1964) and Bozhovich (1968) were the first Soviet psychologists to point out that Vygotsky and Leontiev could not be equated as part of a similar theoretical paradigm:

Lately this concept arises between us as a “line of Vygotsky” [the author referred to the concept of internalization] while the dense and varied theoretical conception of Vygotsky, in any way can be reduced to the internalization. . . . This concept is used at this moment by Leontiev and his followers in Soviet psychology, who understand “internalization” as the “mechanism” by which our internal psychical activity is formed from our external material activity. (Rubinstein, 1964, pp. 338–339; my remark in brackets)

This quotation and the other points raised thus far illustrate the complexity and main movements that existed at the time. In order to give a more balanced picture of the development of Soviet psychology in the 1920s, it is important to highlight the following aspects, which summarize some of the main arguments that need to be considered:

- Since the beginning of this decade, the openness and diversity that characterized psychology in the first years after the October Revolution began to suffer the political pressure that resulted from considering idealistic thinkers as enemies of the revolution. The symbolical construction of the enemy with its terrible consequences for the Soviet society had begun. As a result, idealistic philosophers and psychologists were banished from scientific institutions, and consequently, from history.
- At that time, Vygotsky was not a lonely fighter, as Leontiev and Luria joined him. The three were part of Kornilov’s group and supported its identification of Marxist psychology as an objective psychology. They also supported his mechanic sociobehavioral determinism. The two forces in dispute who were defining Marxist psychology in that decade were Bechterelev’s reflexology and Kornilov’s reactivity.
- In the second half of the decade, Vygotsky abandoned his emphasis on emotions, fantasy, will, personality, and imagination, which characterized “Psychology of Art,” and his first works on defectology. He went on to focus on sign, mediation, internalization, and higher psychical functions in what marked an “instrumental-cognitive turning point” in his work.
- No official position was assumed on psychology in this decade. Psychology was

still ruled by its protagonists, as evident in the different psychological positions that, within the materialism, continued their contradictory movements in those years.

New Paths of Soviet Psychology in the 1930s and 1940s: The Consequences of Stalin’s Purges on Scientific Institutions Over Psychology

At the beginning of the 1930s, psychology continued to be pluralistic, but in a different way from that of the early 1920s. Diversity was alienated within a Marxist definition of psychology. At the end of the 1920s, a new force emerged in the figure of Rubinstein. Rubinstein returned from Germany in 1913 and worked first as a professor and later as Chair of Psychology in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Odessa. In 1930 Rubinstein was invited to head the Chair of Psychology of Hertzzen’s Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad.

The 1930s saw the peak of Stalinist repression. The forced collectivization of the kulaks, the purges within the army and the party, and the massive deportation of people to Siberia for forced work characterized this decade. This situation created a climate of fear and suspicion, which harmed all spheres of Soviet society. Consequently, many persons and social institutions in the Soviet Union became strangely motivated toward the repression of their colleagues. Scientific institutions were no exception.

In the 1930s, the Politburo of the Communist Party began directly commanding all the social spheres on the “correct ideological position.” In psychology, this position was concretized through the decrees by which the Communist Party constantly intervened in the development of psychology, thus placing enormous pressure on the discipline. The decree that most affected psychology in this decade was that against pedology in 1936, as a result of which Vygotsky and other important Soviet psychologists such as Basov were strongly criticized by their colleagues, and pedology was banned from Soviet psychology. Leontiev was one of those who severely criticized Vygotsky (A. N. Leontiev, 1937/1998). Each of the party decrees demanded a reorientation of psychology, engendering serious difficulties in its development.

In 1930, Leontiev resigned from the Academy of Communist Education of the Union State Institute of Communism. In 1932, Luria was appointed as the Section Head of the Ukrainian Psychological Institute in Kharkov, and Leontiev the head of the Department of Child and Developmental Psychology (Bostmanova, Guseva, & Ravich-Schervo, 1994). Shortly after Leontiev and Luria moved to Kharkov, Bozhovich and Zaporozhets joined them to form the Kharkov group. The reasons underlying Vygotsky's separation from his disciples in Moscow remain obscure, and different hypothetical explanations exist—a matter that is beyond the scope of this article. Today, the profound theoretical contradictions between the position of the Kharkov group and Vygotsky at that time are broadly recognized (Galperin, 1995; A. A. Leontiev, 1992; Zaporozhets, 1995). In his later period of life, Vygotsky emphasized speech, meaning, emotions, consciousness, and *per-zhivanie* (emotional experience), rather than practical activity, which was criticized by Leontiev and the Kharkov group.

At the same time, Rubinstein's prestige increased. Paradoxically, his theoretical position had important points of contact with those that were defended by Vygotsky in his last works. As Bruschlinsky (1997) stated,

In his "Philosophical Notebooks" Lenin, in particular, came to the important conclusion that "human consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but it creates it." Such a conclusion of Lenin (which immediately began to mention Vygotsky, Rubinstein and other Soviet psychologists) caused not little displeasure to official Soviet philosophers and ideologues, because it clearly contradicted the primitive dogmatic theory of reflection, impeding its concretization in the science. (p. 6)

The principle of reflection was one of the pillars that supported the dominant Marxist definition of psychology. It was the cornerstone of Leontiev's activity theory, which, while defending the identity between the internal and the external structure of activity, stresses internal activity as a reflection of the external. Unlike Leontiev, both Vygotsky and Rubinstein transcended, at certain moments of their work, the limitations of the concept of reflection, while attempting to create a psychological theoretical system on a new basis, something that none of them achieved during their life.

At the beginning of the 1940s, despite the increasing climate of repression as a result of Stalinism, a new approach to psychology, in which subject and consciousness were seriously taken into account, gained institutional force. This occurred when Rubinstein was nominated as the head of the University of Moscow's Department of Psychology in 1942, and 3 years later, in 1945, as the head of the Department of Psychology of the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences, positions that he occupied simultaneously.² Once in Moscow, Rubinstein invited some of his students from Leningrad, such as Yarochevsky and Komm, to join him at the Department of Psychology of the university. At the same time, he invited Leontiev and others from the Kharkov group, such as Galperin and Zaporozhets (Bruschlinsky, 2001; State University of Moscow's archives on how Rubinshtein was expelled, 1989).

Rubinstein's *Basis of Psychology*, originally published in 1935, was highly appreciated by Soviet psychologists at the epoch, as evidenced by the comments of almost all scientists who reviewed the book. Since the first edition, however, there have been critical comments on its ideological problems (Bogdanshikov, 2008; Archives University of Moscow, 1989). The 1946 edition was the object of severe criticism, which gained new meaning as a result of the ongoing purges in scientific institutions. The departure point was Lysenko's accusation of bourgeois deviations in Soviet genetics, from which started a truly "ideological cleansing" in all the Soviet sciences, known as *Lysenkoism*.³

The purges fostered by Lysenkoism reached their peak at the end of 1940s. Rubinstein was

² Rubinstein was the first Soviet psychologist to be elected as Member Correspondent of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. After him, only Kravkov, in 1946, and Lomov, in 1976, achieved this status. The Academy of Science was the center in which academic politics and decisions in the Soviet Union took place, which, of course, were always mediated by the Soviet political circles.

³ This term is attributed to the expansion of Lysenko's position oriented toward the definition of a Marxist genetic, which led to an ideological purge in all of the Soviet sciences at the time. As a result, the brilliant Soviet academic Vavilov was removed as director of the Institute of Genetics of the Academy of Sciences. He was accused of making a reactionary separation between theory and practice (Sheehan, 1985).

its main victim in psychology, as he was accused for his cosmopolitanism, a term in fashion in the Lysenko discourse. The accusations against Rubinstein were based on the “ideological deviation” of the book and in the way taken by the Chair of Psychology of the Moscow State University under his direction. A session was held by the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Philosophy to discuss the accusations against Rubinstein. Rubinstein was later removed from institutional positions. The opportunism among the Soviet psychologists was evident in the kind of arguments used against Rubinstein (Archives of Lomonosov State University). I call attention to the criticism raised by Galperin and Leontiev in that historical session. The former stated,

Freudism was not politically evaluated in relation to its current role in America. . . . but rather the author seemed to be making a radical critique of Freud, in fact he used some of the more relevant of Freud’s concepts in regards to passion. (Rubinstein, 1989, p. 58)

Leontiev, in his turn, pointed out,

that in the Chair of Psychology are not discussed important national political documents or concepts . . . that is, they had not discussed the matters published in national relevant newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Culture and Life* about the question discussed here today, the cosmopolitanism. (State University of Moscow’s archives on how Rubinstein was expelled, 1989, p. 61)

Both positions were based on the language of Lysenkoism; instead of posing scientific and administrative questions, they addressed ideological problems, something that might have had terrible consequences at that time, as clearly demonstrated in the tragic destiny suffered by Shpet, who had been given the death penalty only a few years earlier (Zinchenko, 1999).

Although the theory of Leontiev was also criticized for its ideological deviations at the same session, his criticism against Vygotsky with regard to pedology (A. N. Leontiev, 1937/1998), together with his position against Rubinstein, is an important antecedent for judging the role that he played some years later in Soviet psychology. After the removal of Rubinstein in 1949, Teplov replaced him for a short time as head of the Chair of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy. In 1951, that responsibility passed to Leontiev, who began his meteoric political career in Soviet psychology (Archives of the Moscow State University, 1989).

An important part of the Kharkov group was organized around Leontiev, who held the Chair of Psychology in the Faculty of Philosophy. Theoretically, Rubinstein focused on personality and consciousness in an attempt to bring into light the person as a complex system. This was the main topic for defining psychology as Marxist. This question had been largely ignored in Soviet psychology. After Rubinstein’s removal, this was once again omitted from Leontiev’s agenda.

As Radziovsky (1988) pointed out,

all the richness expressed in the ideas of the Marxist classical authors in regards to the topic of the subjective “perezhivanie”⁴ were not interpreted in an adequate way by the Soviet philosophers; it was not created a Marxist anthropology in us; the concept of subjective “perezhivanie” did not exist in our philosophical language. Precisely for this reason the transit from the philosophy to the psychology was very difficult. (p. 126)

The convergence between Vygotsky and Rubinstein’s works between 1931 and 1934, when both of them focused on the person instead of on the person’s psychological functions, had not received enough attention either in Russian or Western psychology. The prevailing representation about the incompatibility between them was stimulated to a great extent by Leontiev, and by some of his closer followers in the 1960s.

In summary, the 1930s and the 1940s saw psychology increasingly suffering the pressures and intervention of political power. First was the decree of pedology, which resulted in many works of thinkers such as Vygotsky and Basov remaining unpublished and their works not being used in the official programs of psychology, such as the psychology of art. In the programs for psychological doctoral studies, the only reference to Vygotsky until the 1970s was *The History of the Development of the Higher Psychological Functions*, in which Vygotsky was nearer to Leontiev than in any of his other works. The Soviet hegemonic representation on

⁴ This concept has been translated into English as “emotional experience.” However, this term has a broader meaning. In Vygotsky’s definition, it represents a complex unit within which the environment and the child’s structure of personality emerge as one self-regulative psychological unit of development, in which cognitive and affective dimensions integrate as a new quality of personality (see Yarochevsky, 2007).

Vygotsky in Soviet psychology was defined by Leontiev and his group. Activity theory began to gain increasing force and visibility within Soviet psychology by the end of the 1940s. The advent of a new moment of Soviet psychology was close.

The Decades of the 1950s and the 1960s: The Emergence of Activity Theory as the New Marxist Psychology

Lysenko's "right Marxist definition of genetics" led to the official support of the definition of a "Marxist version" in all the Soviet sciences. On the basis of a Party Decree at beginning of the 1950s, a meeting was held between the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Medical Sciences, known as the "Pavlov's Session." The meeting defined Pavlov's theory on conditioned reflexes as the scientific basis from which a Marxist psychology should be constructed (Bostmanova et al., 1994).

The physiological jargon imprinted itself again in the published psychological works. The reaction against psychology as a science was so pronounced in "Pavlov's Session" that Budilova, Lomov, and Shorojova (1975) observed, "In the discussion many of the participants rejected the alternative of an objective study of psyche, which led them to propose the replacement of psychology by the physiology of higher nervous activity" (p. 12).

Subjective topics developed by Vygotsky and Rubinstein, such as emotions, imagination, sense, and personality, subsequently disappeared from Soviet psychology. Only Bozhovich's team, the disciples of Rubinstein in Moscow, and Ananiev and Miasichev in Leningrad continued theorizing on personality, but even they retained physiological jargon in their writings.

As Abuljanova and Bruchlinsky (1989) stated,

Focused on the discussions about the object of psychology in its relation to the theory of the reflection and in its relation with physiology, psychologists did not take into account personality either theoretical or methodological as the basis for the definition of the object of the psychology: psyche as quality of the brain and reflection of the world left to be seen as quality of the person, as personality. (p. 15)

Two different kinds of reductionism simultaneously converged in the Soviet psychology during these years: (a) a physiological reductionism, officially established during this time; and (b) a reductionism centered on object-oriented activity that progressed through the powerful Department of Psychology headed by Leontiev. This widespread orientation toward a natural objective science represented a huge obstacle in further advancing a new ontological definition⁵ of the human psyche, as Vygotsky, Rubinstein, Ananiev, Bozhovich, and Miasichev had attempted.

After Stalin's death in 1956, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party decreed the restructuring of Soviet life, which placed new demands on Soviet psychology and saw a new era in its development. What became evident after Stalin's death was a period of decreased direct political interference in science by the Politburo of the Communist Party. However, the resolutions and priorities established at that time as a result of political interferences continued to influence psychology for some time. Because social institutions were more resistant to change than other areas of social life, and because institutional mechanisms remained alive during the times of political interferences, Stalinism survived.

New political agendas prioritized the improvement of education and of the quality of specialists in different areas of the productive sphere. In addition, the ghosts of the ideological vigilance and of the idealistic and bourgeois deviation remained as references for the scientific functioning of institutions.

⁵ To avoid the metaphysical connotation of the term "ontology" as the universal essence of being, the concept is used here to emphasize the different qualities of such topics that became intelligible through the theoretical constructions resulting from different scientific domains. The way in which the term is used in this work does not have any pretension to define knowledge as a representation of an external given being. The knowledge represents a way of intelligibility, which permits a path of new concepts and practices on which the legitimization of scientific theories is grounded. At the same time, the recognition of different theoretical definitions that coexist in any scientific realm impedes a new return to the metaphysical, as the position is based on a unique and universal principle. It seems to have taken place in the positions held by some radical social constructionists for whom all human phenomena are explained as discursive practices (Gergen, 2006).

The reorientation of psychology toward education and the emphasis on such topics as moral and professional preparation received high priority. As a consequence, topics such as personality, learning, and development were again foregrounded within Soviet psychology. However, materialism as doctrine still prevailed over dialectics, a fact that, together with the dominant social subjectivity of psychological institutions, helped the representation of an objective psychology remain synonymous with Marxist psychology. The traditional Soviet culture, ruled by its interest to be in a “correct ideological position,” moved from reflexological reductionism—which became the symbol of the “old times”—to a new way of sustaining the ideal of an objective science, by understanding the human psyche as a reflection of a given concrete reality. Nothing was more sensitive to this representation than the idea of practical activity with objects introduced by Leontiev’s activity theory:

At first glance it seems that the representation about the object-based nature of the psyche relates only to the particular sphere of cognitive processes; that in relation to the spheres of needs and emotions, this representation does not extend. This, however, is not so. (A. N. Leontiev, 1975, p. 86)⁶

Activity theory progressively gained a central institutional and political status in the wake of Leontiev’s rapid political ascension. His political career peaked in 1963 when he received the Lenin Prize, a political distinction that bolstered his political strength. It was then that Bruner, Cole, and, later, Wertsch visited the Soviet Union for the first time.

Although Basov and Rubinstein were the first Soviet psychologists to dabble in the concept of activity, Leontiev transformed a specific activity type, practical activity with objects, into the core tenet of his theory. Instead of focusing on the unity of consciousness and activity as reciprocal, interwoven moments as Rubinstein did, Leontiev interpreted that unity, namely, in its movement from activity to consciousness, as a reflection of reality (Zinchenko, 2002).

In the 1960s, activity theory was consolidated into a mature version of a “Marxist psychology.” The new theoretical terminology resulted from the dominance of activity theory in the 1960s that replaced the physiological jargon that had been dominant. A new psychological

jargon as the basis of an objective Marxist psychology emerged. Psychological works mimetically employed the institutionalized terms of activity theory. Concepts such as object, action, goal, and internalization replaced physiological terms as the foundational principles of Marxist psychology. Psychical processes began to be treated as intellectual operations originating from external operations. This treatment persisted throughout Leontiev’s theoretical trajectory, even in his last relevant publication, *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality*: “Moreover, it has been demonstrated that internal thought processes are nothing but the result of internalization and specific transformation of external practical activity, and that a stable transit from one form of activity to the other exists” (A. N. Leontiev, 1975, p. 44; my translation from Russian).

These few lines summarized, to a significant extent, the focus on external practical actions as the source of psychological processes, understood by Leontiev as internal activity. This focus had not only a theoretical basis but also an ideological ground, as Galperin (1984) clearly stressed: “At the time we were confronted by two dangers: behaviorism and subjectivism. To avoid subjectivism it was necessary to keep constantly in mind the idea of the primacy of external activity” (p. 59).⁷

The emphasis on external, practical activity that transformed Leontiev’s thesis into an ideological principle for the development of Marxist psychology was attributed to Marx. Through this ideological metamorphosis, activity became an ontological concept, sacredly situated at the center of Marxist psychology. Although Marx emphasized practical activity, specifically, work activity, he did so with regard to a different problem type. Unlike Leontiev, his emphasis did not aim to reduce the genesis of the human mind to practical operations with objects. Leon-

⁶ The English translation equates the term objective to object-based nature. The second term is the one used in the original Russian version and the one I consider more fitting because Leontiev referred to a primary objectivity defined by concrete material objects.

⁷ The Russian version of this article was published in 1983 as a chapter in the book *A. N. Leontiev and modern psychology: A collection of articles in memory of A. N. Leontiev* (pp. 240–244; taken from the step note that appeared in the English version published in the Soviet Union).

Leontiev's work was characterized by his attempt to import, mimetically, Marx's philosophical concepts into psychology. It is interesting as Leontiev progressively quoted more of Marx and Lenin, leaving aside the references to Vygotsky and other psychological theories. This trend was especially acute in his last book, *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality*, in which there is virtually no reference to Vygotsky.

Leontiev (1975) stated, "In this lies the idea of Lenin's requirement [about reflection] that we go not from sensation to the external world but from the external word toward sensing, from the external word as primary to subjective psychological phenomena as secondary" (p. 49).⁸

Leontiev's designated activity, given the ability to explain the psyche in terms of external operations, was the only exclusive means to achieve a materialistic representation of psychological processes. Doing so enabled him to adhere wholly to Lenin's formulation of reflection, an ontological principle that led to understand psychical functions by their nature as identical to the external operation in which they find its genesis through the internalization.

Koshmanova (2007) pinpointed an interesting difference between Vygotsky and Leontiev: "However, to my mind, the Vygotskian notion of activity seems different. In those rare cases when Vygotsky spoke about human activity, he used the notion merely as an explanatory principle, but for Leontiev it was an object of research" (p. 69).

Evidence indicates that Leontiev's concrete definition of activity is imprisoned within a very narrow circle of practical actions; any psychological process, function, or structure originates in practical activities with objects. Activity theory did not explain how internalized operations become part of a subjective system. This objective character that Leontiev ascribed to his theory was criticized by some of his closest followers and collaborators:

Essentially, for a long time we were forced to be content with the fact that some external correlations were established between activity and mental processes, for example, noting that given such and such specific characteristics of activity, or such and such a structure, such and such a motivation of activity, and so forth, such and such changes in mental processes occur, although the mechanism of these changes and the very nature of these mental processes were never studied in particular. (Zaporozhets, 1995, p. 14)

The lack of attention to the subjective side of mental processes was a defining characteristic of Leontiev's Activity Theory; the activity to which he referred is grounded in concrete operations with concrete objects.

Although Leontiev centered on a strictly instrumental definition of psychical function, he fell into a naturalistic trap when he attempted to explain human motivation. As he did not recognize a specific ontological character of the psyche, identifying the psyche as internalized operations, he could not explain human needs as being psychological, which forced him to identify need as a natural state of the organism. The dominant scheme "activity-object" completely excluded the subject of activity and its generative function: "Need is only a state of necessity of the organism that in itself is not capable of giving rise to any specific activity . . . Only as a result of its encounter with the object corresponding to it, it is able to become capable of directing and regulating activity" (A. N. Leontiev, 1975, p. 87). That definition remains imprisoned within a naturalistic-social dichotomy, in which need is biologically understood by genesis, whereas the object is social, but given a priori of the human activity. The author attempted to solve this dichotomy through a mechanical way, by the encounter of a given a priori need with the also given a priori object, as a result of which need becomes psychical.

Only after the meeting of need with its object does the need become a motive without any reference to a change in its structure. Based on this, Leontiev defined motive as the object of activity. Human creativity, fantasy, and imagination do not configure psychical activity, which, according to Leontiev, is reduced, in the understanding of motive, to being a mere instrumental device; activity is understood in this definition as the link between the object and the need and as the way through which external operations become internal as result of internalization. Activity is a self-regulated system that replaces the person as its subject, as a result of which the subjective processes of the subject are not taken into account. For this reason, the

⁸ From the English edition (Leontiev, 1978, p. 30). The passage in English was not fully quoted because of the distorted meaning of one word that, in turn, altered the meaning of the entire passage.

human being is a biological creature whose psychological processes take place in terms of its activities. As Davydov (1981) clearly pointed out, “Objects *themselves* (emphasis by Davydov) guide the transformations of this activity in the process of the subject practical contacts with them” (p. 14).

The concept of activity, as defined by Leontiev, marks the cornerstone of a theoretical system outside of which its application is meaningless. The objective character of the activity concept was narrowly followed by most of Leontiev’s more faithful followers. Elkonin (1995) stated,

The idea of this so-called internal—or, I might better say—intellectual activity has become confused with the question of the division of any activity, including intellectual activity, into an orienting and an executive component. This division seems to me to be real not only for external, practical activity, that is, for an activity accomplishing some practical task by outwardly changing things, but also for activity that we call intellectual. (p. 32)

In Elkonin’s quotation, it is possible to see two main characteristics of Leontiev’s objective reductionism: first, the direct relationship between external and internal activity, and second, the reduction of internal activity to intellectual operations without regard for affective psychological functions. Such a reductionism in the understanding of internal activity fueled the disproportionate focus on the study of cognitive functions that prevailed until the mid-1970s in empirical inquiries anchored in activity theory. Since the end of the 1950s, renowned Soviet psychologists (Rubinstein, Ananiev, Bozhovich, and Miasichev among others) have criticized Leontiev. Rubinstein (1964) stated,

They [Leontiev and his group] understand as internalization the “mechanism” as result of which our psychological internal activity resulted from our material external activity. The principles [in Vygotsky’s definition] we have formulated above suffer here a distortion from which results that insightful and important principles about the priority of practical activity and its role in the formation of theoretical mental activity acquires an inappropriate character . . . Any external material activity of man already contains in itself psychological components through which that activity is regulated. (pp. 339–349; author’s translation from Spanish).

Rubinstein’s remark touches on an important idea overlooked for a long time in Soviet psychology: Any external activity is in itself a

psychological activity, because it contains psychological components responsible for its psychological sense. This idea constituted the core of his famous principle concerning the unity between consciousness and activity: Activity is a psychological concept not because it signifies the cornerstone for defining all psychological processes—as Leontiev proposed—but because it embodies the subjective processes of consciousness.

The consequences of activity theory’s ideological character until the mid-1970s are revealed in the topics and language employed in the articles published since the beginning of the 1960s in the main Soviet journal of psychology, *Questions of Psychology*. In their analysis on that production, Matiushkin and Kuzmina (1983) asserted,

In the category of activity was included everything: needs and motivation, psychological states and psychological qualities of personality, as well as the different kind of human behaviors and actions. . . . Activity is taken as the unique category of Marxist psychology. Other psychological concepts like communication, personality, and consciousness are considered only through the prism of the activity. (p. 9)

At that time, minimal inquiries into the fields of clinical, health, and social psychologies were evident. These fields were incompatible with the language of activity theory. Nevertheless, some groups—specifically, those led by Ananiev and Miasichev in Leningrad that were oriented to the study of social, engineering, and institutional psychology—opposed this reductionism. Miasichev (1960) also brought important insights to clinical psychology. Bozhovich’s group studied motivation and personality on the basis of Vygotsky’s theoretical principles. Another important group committed to the study of personality and motivation was that formed by Rubinstein’s disciples, headed by Antsiferova, Abuljanova, and Bruschlinsky.

In sketching the situation of the Soviet psychology for decades, Abuljanova (1973) stressed,

Despite the fierce polemics between those addicted to a sociopsychological explanation of the psyche and the supporters of the physiological or cybernetic explanation, the position of both groups is identical. The attempt to materialize the psyche or assign it the materiality through its identification with something different reveals the antidiialectical character of this form of knowledge, the inability to apply dialectic to the

discovery of the specificity of psychic phenomenon. (p. 49).

The one-sided position of the theory of activity implies a reductionist view of subjectivity, which is reduced to the subjective images of the external given objects. As *Leontiev (1975)* remarked, “In the process generated by these relations, objects are posited as subjective images in the human brain, as consciousness” (p. 31). The ambiguity of such a claim is high, as it has everything that has to do with subjectivity in *Leontiev’s* work. Consciousness seems to be reduced in this claim to the subjective in the human brain. The emphasis on consciousness over activity that had characterized the works of *Zinchenko* in the last fighting years had not been casual, though he had been a close collaborator of *Leontiev*.

In the mid-1970s, Soviet psychology began a new important chapter as the result of several events that took place in those years, among which were the death of *Leontiev* and the displacement of political power from the Moscow State University to the Institute of Psychology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The latter institution was headed by a disciple of *Ananiev*, *B. F. Lomov*, who, surrounded by *Rubinstein’s* disciples, represented an important new pole of political and theoretical power in Soviet psychology. In addition to these two events, other important changes in Soviet society and the Soviet political order also influenced psychology.

A New Moment in Soviet Psychology: The Fall of Activity as the Main Concept of Soviet Psychology

As was the case throughout history after long periods of hegemony, the changes in Soviet psychology and society since the 1970s wrought a fecund moment for questioning the limitations of activity theory in the broader circles of Soviet psychology. In 1977, the Soviet Union’s Fifth Congress of the Society of Psychologists made the “problem of activity in Soviet psychology” its central theme. The congress sparked an unprecedented discussion regarding the conceptual limitations of imputing the genesis of psychological phenomena to concrete activity with objects that *Leontiev* had advanced during the preceding two decades.

Many of the most relevant Soviet psychologists of that time, including *Bruschlinsky*, *Galperin*, *Pushkin*, *Menchiskaya*, *Tijomirov*, *Nepomnichaya*, and *Farapanova*, among others, participated in the congress proceedings.

In her presentation, *Nepomnichaya (1977)* highlighted,

The realization of the “activity approach” which had huge relevance for the development of a materialistic psychology was developed in such a way that led to a unilateral and limited representation of the object of psychology. The object of psychology was split into different parts; the thinking, sensory processes and activity split personality and personality was employed in a narrow way, reducing itself to the motives and leaving out other important dimensions of the subject taken as a whole. (pp. 72–73)

The concept of personality maintained a noticeably secondary and irrelevant status within activity theory until the 1975 publication of *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality*, in which *Leontiev* established new theoretical avenues for understanding his previous definition of personal sense. These avenues were promising for the study of personality and introduced new “life” to subsequent inquiries of personality in the 1980s within this theoretical approach (*Asmolov, 1984; Stolín, 1983*). However, because the study of personality demanded that the general principles of activity theory, rather than one concept, be modified, this promissory line could not advance further, as activity theory’s conceptual matrix had not permitted opportunities for advancing the study of personality.

The topic of personality did not represent merely a specific category. Within the concept of personality were general theoretical questions that appeared indirectly and partially in Soviet psychology because of ideological pressures. The topics of the subject—subjectivity, consciousness, and society—began to be treated openly by a restrictive circle of Soviet psychologists in the 1970s and the 1980s (*Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Bruschlinsky, 1994; Chudnovsky, 1988*). However, some years later in Russian psychology, those themes emerged with particular force (*Bruschlinsky, 1994, 2002; Chudnovsky, 2006; Serguénko, 2009; Skotnikova, 2009; Tolstyx, 2008; Zinchenko, 2002, 2007, 2009*).

Another category that attained a distinctive status in those years and likewise entailed tran-

scending the boundaries of activity theory, as defined by Leontiev, was communication. Initial discussions of this concept attempted to assimilate it into the classic scheme of the object-oriented activity. Consequently, Lomov (1978) criticized A. A. Leontiev's logic in his article "Activity and Communication" (1978). He defended communication as a particular psychological category irreducible to the terminology of activity theory. Communication was understood by Lomov as a dialogical process rather than as an instrumental one. The criticism of Lomov echoed in certain of Leontiev's followers some years later (Davydov, 2002; Smirnov, 1993; Zinchenko, 1995, 2002).

As Lomov wrote:

The general psychological representation of activity, the schemes of its analysis and its corresponding conceptual apparatus were organized in relation to the study of the individual activity, which naturally was defined by the own problematic of the general psychology. . . . For this reason, occasionally were applied to individual activity positions that were elaborated by Marxism for the analysis of the activity of society, and on the other side psychical processes are treated as particular types of activity (Lomov, 1978).

Failing to perceive the need for a new theoretical paradigm, the proponents of activity theory worked minimally to develop new concepts and grounded new psychological phenomena exclusively through the original formulation of concrete practical activity, in a process in which it came to be almost a new metaphysical dogma.

The concept of communication specifies dynamics and unfolding effects of emotional contacts between persons who cannot be described by the one-sided character "subject-object" supported by the activity theoretical framework. Communication as a dialogical process simultaneously involves the generative and active positions of the involved persons, whose fantasies and imagination and the open expressions of their subjectivities are inseparable from the communication. They are not concrete objects in that process, because the other is irreducible to be an object; even when acting as a listener he subjectively produces what he listened to. There was a very naïve attempt to present the other as a listener through the concept of object.

The new theoretical avenues opened in the 1970s figured decisively in the later openness of Russian psychology to a new agenda, which included psychologists who were instrumental

in founding Soviet psychology but who had been banished as idealistic. The movement that began in the last years of Soviet psychology, and that continues today in Russian psychology, has had little impact on the traditional interpretations of Soviet authors by Western researchers.

As Cole and Gajdamaschko (2010) recently observed,

Simultaneously there has been a rather broad recognition of the intercultural appropriation of Vygotsky's ideas. The resulting difficulties require a critical approach to all claims of authenticity about adherences to presumed originals or fidelity in application of these ideas in contemporary scholarship on learning and development. (p. 253)

Such pitfalls concerning the intercultural appropriation of Vygotsky's ideas by Western authors can be extended generally to these authors' interpretations of Soviet psychology. Such appropriations have omitted the cultural-historical contexts and the distinct moments of development in the works of Soviet psychologists.

Some Final Comments

Soviet psychology represented a broad and heterogeneous movement whose different trends shared certain general principles that allowed it to be defined as a cultural-historical psychology. However, deep contradictions among those trends also existed but had not been studied in depth by Russian and Western psychologists until very recently. The paths taken by Soviet psychology during its short life were highly influenced by the dramatic political, historical, and social changes that characterized the Soviet era.

The discovery of Vygotsky by American psychologists at a moment in which this psychology was in crucial moments of change, as result of the critics of Skinnerian behaviorism and of the advent of cognitive psychology, was decisive in the growing interests in Vygotsky, who arose in a forefront group of American psychologists actively involved with the changes that were taking place in American psychology. A new representation of Soviet psychology with which the West works until today equated, through different labels, Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria as part of the same theoretical paradigm. This representation was cultivated by Le-

ontiev and his group in the 1960s, who tried to monopolize Vygotsky's legacy. A small group of American psychologists in this period began a close relation with the group headed by Leontiev.

Leontiev's activity theory embodied the tradition that prevailed in Soviet psychology, identifying the Marxist character of psychology in its objectivity as science. It made a great difference with the attempts made by Vygotsky and Rubinstein, in different ways, by posing the consciousness and the person in the center of psychology. Such a point of convergence between these authors allowed some of their disciples to connect with each other when they discussed personality and the active position of the person (Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Bozhovich, 1968; Bruschlinsky, 1994).

Many ideas and topics developed in Soviet psychology that were overlooked for a long time by Soviet and Western psychologists are starting to gain attention. There has been a profound transformation in the interpretation of Soviet psychology and its main authors, both in the West and in Russia, which is evident in a growing number of works that have focused on consciousness, subjectivity, and the subject (Bruschlinsky, 2002; Davydov, 2002; Kudriavtsev, 2006; Serguenco, 2009; Skotnikova, 2009; Yasnitsky, 2012; Zinchenko, 2002).

Different historical moments and trends that characterized the development of Soviet and current Russian psychologies are complexly interconnected to each other, and many of the theoretical and epistemological aspects of Soviet psychology could be reinterpreted today through the current paths of Russian psychology. The attention to this movement developed within this article opens up the possibility of advancing new interpretations of Soviet psychology that, in turn, may contribute to new interpretations of its legacy today.

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