

AQ: 1 **Advancing the Topics of Social Reality, Culture, and Subjectivity
From a Cultural–Historical Standpoint: Moments, Paths,
and Contradictions**

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This article discusses how the topics of social reality, culture, and subjectivity have evolved throughout a cultural–historical tradition in psychology and links these processes to the first steps taken by Soviet psychology in this direction. Despite Soviet psychology being the birthplace of cultural–historical psychology, the topics of culture and social realities were treated in a narrow way because of the ideological dogmatism of the different dominant theoretical trends that characterized its short existence. The author discusses some of the factors that prevented a closer attention to the topics of subjectivity, symbolical processes, communication and the social genesis of human consciousness in the Soviet psychology, despite the numerous antecedents that some of its more dialectical thinkers brought into light on such topics. Advancing on some of Vygotsky’s latest concepts, like *perezhivanie* and sense, the author proposes to redefine the topic of subjectivity from a cultural–historical standpoint. In doing so, the author emphasizes the unity of symbolical and emotional processes that emerge during living experiences, centering on the concepts of subjective sense and subjective configuration to focus on the subjective side of any social experience. The concepts of social and individual subjectivities that support this theoretical proposal transform subjectivity into a quality of every human experience or event. Culture, in turn, would be a subjective system within which new subjectivities are continuously renewed and reinvented in an endless development that characterizes human existence.

Keywords: subjectivity, culture, subjective senses, dialogue, cultural–historical psychology

AQ: 3 Cultural–historical theory is normally associated with the works produced by Vygotsky between 1928 and 1931. However, from a historical perspective, it can be argued that the majority of Soviet scholars in that epoch developed their works based on cultural, historical, and social principles and noted the cultural–historical genesis of the human psyche, as it has been referred to in the works of many authors (González Rey, 2011; Matusov, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2012). Nonetheless, these principles have been understood in different manners by different authors and schools within the cultur-

al–historical approach in psychology. Currently, cultural, sociocultural, cultural–historical, and activity approaches are mixed and overlap through authors and trends that defend different theoretical and epistemological principles, and it seems important to discuss the distinctive aspects of the cultural–historical approach that emerged in Soviet psychology and the challenges that face current developments within this legacy.

The increasing influence that the concept of culture has gained in psychology combined with the advances in the discussion of the symbolic in philosophy and the social sciences in the past three decades have created a climate for advancing the foundational positions of Soviet psychology in terms of topics and questions that were not the foci of attention for the pioneers of this theoretical approach. Indeed, within the past 25 years, many different theoretical positions have been advanced regarding the matter

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of culture in psychology in theories that include psychoanalysis, social constructionism, narrative psychology, and dialectical constructivism, among others.

When the pioneers of Soviet psychology developed their works, the dominant representations of both social reality and culture were still limited. Thus, the definitions of the social instances and their symbolical-subjective nature were absent in that psychology. The most advanced psychologists during the Soviet era used cognition or intellectual processes rather than the concept of the symbolic as a means to emphasize the presence of culture in the human psyche. In the 1920s, the dichotomy between social reality and the individual prevailed in Soviet psychology. The scheme of a socially determined psyche that was defined outside of the person was perpetuated as an important principle of Soviet psychology because social facts that were understood as external and objective realities omitted the living dialogical nature of the social spaces.

Psychologists under the leadership of Rubinstein, Ananiev, Bozhovich, Miasichev, and others dissimilar to A. N. Leontiev advanced the comprehension of the social relationships that characterized the socially immediate circumstances within which human activities occur. However, the naturalistic representation always prevailed as the dominant and politically recognized approach of Soviet psychology due to its materialistic character; moreover, based on this character, this representation was officially recognized as a Marxist psychology. This naturalistic representation of human beings and reality appeared through the subject-object split in which the object was understood as a given, fundamental, and a priori entity. This issue has much to do with “the fundamental problem of philosophy”—as it was called in Soviet time, according to which concrete reality was considered as the primary and essential in contraposition to consciousness, considered as secondary and a reflection of reality.

Until the 1970s, the emphasis in Soviet psychology was never placed on the social relationships that are inherent to the development of human consciousness. Only in the second half of the 1970s, when a new political situation began to emerge in the Soviet Union did new theoretical forces emerge in Soviet psychology; new questions that had remained under the

shadow of that psychology for a long time began to be discussed.

Together with the above-mentioned facts and the death of A. N. Leontiev, psychology saw new winds blowing in the Soviet political milieu. Taken together, all of these facts made the expression of the growing discontent with the dogmas generated by Leontiev’s activity theory possible, which resulted in the emergence of new discussions inside Soviet psychology that peaked in 1977 during the V Soviet Union’s Congress of the Society of Psychology. At this Congress, the main topic was “the problem of activity in Soviet psychology.” Psychologists from different theoretical positions, such as Bruslinsky (1977); Nepomnichaya (1977) and others, made important critiques of the manner in which A. N. Leontiev used the concept of activity. That congress and some key publications from the end of the 1960s and the 1970s (Abulhanova, 1973, 1977; Bozhovich, 1968; Chudnovsky, 1976; Lomov, 1978) created a new scenario in Soviet psychology.

The 1970s represented a turning point in that psychology in which a fertile ground for the emergence of new problems became available. Topics such as consciousness, subjectivity, communication, and culture entered the agenda of Soviet psychology. As Vassilieva noted, “The obvious limitations of the theory of activity, namely that it cannot adequately address such phenomena as human interaction, creativity, culture, consciousness, semiotization, and spiritual life, were not acknowledged until the reforms of perestroika were well underway” (Vassilieva, 2010, p. 151).

This new moment in psychology also allowed for different interpretations of the classics, including the work of Vygotsky, whose legacy was also dominated by the interpretation given by A. N. Leontiev and his group. Despite Leontiev’s attempt to monopolize the legacy of Vygotsky since the 1960s and to position himself as the successor of Vygotsky, many of Vygotsky’s main works remained unpublished during the entire time that Leontiev ruled Soviet psychology.

This article makes visible the legacy of that period and brings to light two topics that have important antecedents in the classical works of Soviet psychology: (a) a new definition of the social system in its subjective and dialogical configuration, and (b) a new definition of sub-

jectivity based on cultural–historical principles. To offer a complete picture of Russian and Soviet psychologies is evidently beyond the scope of the present article. Instead, I aim to advance on those trends that represented important antecedents for developing the topic of subjectivity from a cultural–historical standpoint.

The Narrow Comprehension of Social Realities in Soviet Psychology: Social Realities Understood as External Environment and External Objects

It is curious that in “Thesis on Feuerbach,” Marx defined the *human essence* as formed by the totality of social relations, a concept that formally informed Soviet philosophy and that was not developed within Soviet psychology. In this psychology, social reality was understood as a given social environment instead of drawing attention to the complex processes of social relations engendered by social symbolic practices within the different forms of sociocultural and economic organizations.

The way in which Soviet psychology was represented in the second half of the 1920s was well synthesized by Luria 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” (Luria, 1928, p. 347). This statement is particularly relevant given what was required at that time by Soviet political authorities for authors to publish in the United States. This article of Luria’s represented a synthesis of the main ideas that were hegemonic within the group of Kornilov in a time politically ruled by Kornilov.

As Zinchenko (2009) stated,

After a fruitful postrevolutionary period associated with the names of S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdiaev, V. S. Solovev, P. A. Florenskii, G. I. Chelpanov, and G. G. Shpet, all of whom made a substantial contribution not only to philosophy but also to the psychology of consciousness, the problem of consciousness began to be pushed aside by the early 1920s. Priority was given to reactology. (p. 50)

Vygotsky (2012), as a part of Kornilov’s group, shared some of his position in the second half of the 1920s:

The words “Marxist psychology” do not refer to a particular branch of psychology or a particular direction within it. These words signify scientific psychology overall; Marxist psychology is a synonym for scientific psychology, and in this sense the creation of a Marxist psychology is the culmination of the lengthy historical process of transforming psychology into a natural science. (p. 98)

The prevalence of social realities as synonymous with external objective influences led Kornilov and his group to emphasize behavior as a direct reaction to external influences, that is, as a reaction that maintains the dichotomy between the external and the internal. This emphasis created many difficulties for the advancement of the specific ontological character of human consciousness and social instances. In the most advanced moment of his definition of higher psychological functions, Vygotsky understood their genesis as the result of the internalization of external operations and reduced the social environment to the objects on which these operations were performed and to the artificial devices that mediate the psychological functions, whose nature was social and cultural. Vygotsky replaced the logic of functions with the logic of the system in his works between 1932 and 1934. The proximity of Vygotsky with Kornilov in 1928 was clear in the following statement:

Materialist psychology strives to be a social psychology first and foremost. “Marxist psychology,” Kornilov wrote, “sees every person as a variation of a particular class. This is why, in the study of human behavior, we must move not from individual psychology to social psychology but in the opposite direction” (Kornilov, 1924, p. 75;¹ Vygotsky, 2012, p. 99).

The concept of activity as developed by A. N. Leontiev referred to an individual activity with concrete objects that could be social or natural; however, in both cases, the objects were given a priori with respect to the individual’s interaction with them. B. F. Lomov critically referred to this use of the concept of activity as follows:

As result of the inadequate identification of individual activity the activity of society in psychological analysis completely omitted the relationship of the individual with other persons. Frequently, the individual was rep-

¹ This quotation of Kornilov was taken by Vygotsky from “Sovremennaiia psikhologiiia i Marksizm” [The contemporary psychology and Marxism] Kornilov, 1924.

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resented as one-to-one with their activity with objects. Sometimes, activity was treated as a closed system with the capacity for self-movement, which engendered perceptual and other psychological processes that formed individual consciousness and personality. (Lomov, 1984, p. 194; my translation from Russian)

The individual character of human activity together with the omission of psychological social processes by activity theory was, to a great extent, responsible for the little progress of social psychology in the Soviet Union and the minimal advances related to some important theoretical questions regarding the evolution of Soviet psychology.

It is important to note the identifications between external and internal activity that were made by A. N. Leontiev, who identified psychological processes as internal activities. A. N. Leontiev wrote the following:

Contemporary genetic research supports the undisputable fact of the existence of the processes of thinking, which take place also as an external activity with material objects. Especially in them, it is demonstrable that the internal processes of thinking are not anything other than the result of the internalization and the specific transformation of external practical activity and that there is a constant interaction between one form of activity and the other. (Leontiev, 1975, p. 44; my translation from Russian)

Although A. N. Leontiev explicitly referred to consciousness throughout his work, in his work, consciousness was always an epiphenomenon of activity. It is impossible to elaborate a theory of consciousness based on an understanding of psychological processes as internal forms of activity that are internalized from the outside. This definition of thinking offered by A. N. Leontiev did not leave room for an understanding thinking not as a reflection but as a production that integrates other subjects' generative functions, such as imagination and fantasy.

A subtle movement from the term *dialectic*, which was part of the official discourse at the time, to the term *materialist psychology*, emerged. The latter terminology became synonymous with Marxist psychology and evolved in such a way that materialistic became synonymous with objectivity as the main attribute of the definition of Marxist psychology.

The definition of social reality as equal to external influences, external operation, or external object preserved the subject-object dichotomy. This definition transforms the object into

an externally given entity and concrete reality into the immediate cause of psychical functions, thus preserving an idea of causality that is based on the external as primary and the psyche as secondary, a position that embodied the "fundamental problem" of philosophy as it was stated above in this article. This formula broke down any suspicion of idealism, preserved a "materialist psychology" and thus actively impeded the emergence of a "Marxist dialectic cultural-historical psychology."

As a consequence of the prevailing interpretation of Vygotsky's theory in Soviet psychology until the 1980s, and as result of the omission that affected his original works, some of the rich and innovative works of Vygotsky published between 1932 and 1934 did not appear in the Russian language until the 1980s. This impeded new interpretations and developments of some of Vygotsky's main ideas and precluded the likelihood of these ideas informing Soviet psychology until the 1980s.

The rejection of Vygotsky by A.N. Leontiev can be verified by many different facts, including Leontiev's preface to "Psychology of Art" in 1965; Leontiev's critical paper to the ideological deviances of Vygotsky (A. N. Leontiev, 1937/1989) and the nonpublication of most of the work of Vygotsky until the 1980s, after the death of Leontiev. Zinchenko clearly remarked that "P. I. Zinchenko was A. N. Leontiev's disciple, who actively participated in the so called "activity campaign of Leontiev" in psychology. To be honest, one should say that this was also a 'campaign' against cultural-historical psychology" (Zinchenko, 2002, p. 11).

Following some of the discussions that were inaugurated in Soviet psychology in the 1970s, it became possible to perceive the effort to advance the understanding of the social reality as a complex scenario within which human activity and subjects emerge. In this regard, Abulhanova wrote, "The 'vital activity' of the social individual is submitted to particular laws tied to the laws of social life, which at the same time create the difference with those social laws" (Abulhanova, 1977, p. 8; my translation from Russian).

One of the most interesting criticisms of the one-sided scheme of "mental process-activity" was offered by one of the closer collaborators of A. N. Leontiev, Zaporozhets:

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 characteristic of activity, or such and such structure, such and such 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, Gal'perin, & El'konin, 1995, p. 14)

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That immediateness referred by Zaporozhets that characterized the relationship between activity and mental processes leaves macrosocial processes out of the genesis of human consciousness and, at the same time, omits the definition of the specific nature of the mental processes. Activity with concrete material objects is understood as a direct determinant of psychical functions.

The group led by Lomov at the Institute of Psychology of the Academy of Sciences had a decisive role in the social turning point of Soviet psychology in the 1970s, and in the criticism that sought to overcome the restrictions imposed by the manner in which the concept of activity was treated in activity theory. This group addressed and overcame the restrictions in the comprehension of social determinism within activity theory. The critiques of the reductionist definition of social reality as the immediate social environment that surrounds individuals dealt closely with the explicit emergence of subjectivity as a term used for the first time in Soviet psychology in the 1970s.

A New Definition of Social Reality in Soviet Psychology: Communication, Dialogue, and Subject

The one-sided comprehension of activity with objects understood as the immediate relationships of the individuals with concrete objects omitted the most important side of any human activity; that is, the fact of it occurs within relational contexts. Our relationship with our surroundings always implies that living activities existing within the intertwined flow of many unfolding avenues open themselves during the course of activity. This flow of endless avenues that characterize the realization of human activities implies the emergence, change, and development of thoughts, feelings, and other psychological functions that usually

emerge from the subjective configuration of the activity as such, which closely addresses the subjective senses experienced by the subject during the course of activity. This complex subjective process is always configured the facts and processes that are articulated at the present moment in one activity. This way of understanding activity as a complex human network that simultaneously involves different processes within which new subjective configurations emerge within a dialogical space that generates it owns relational demands was never defined in Soviet psychology.

Lomov was the first Soviet author who advanced the concept of communication as a specific human process that is not reducible to human activity as a system of operations with external objects. According to Lomov (1984), face-to-face human communication does not require any type of object mediation. In this definition, Lomov attempted to overcome the dichotomy between external and internal that was crystallized in Soviet psychology. He wrote:

Representing an essential part of the subject's vital activity, communication is considered an important determinant of all of the psychical system, of its structure, dynamic and development. However, this determination is not external to the psyche. The psyche and communication are intrinsically interrelated with one another. (Lomov, 1984, p. 248; my translation from Russian)

Overcoming the idea of the social reality as external and objective in relation to the individual, Lomov made an important step forward in the development of a new ontological definition of the human psyche. Social instances are not considered to be a result of external influences or external operations with objects but rather as a qualitative side of human existence and practice within which the social interactions and the individuals are intrinsically interrelated as human experience. This position represented an important theoretical challenge for that psychology and implied challenges to practically all of the traditional definitions on which Soviet psychology was based and that remain valid to this day when the remnants of an instrumental psychology are still alive.

The recognition of the specific character of communication and the relevance attributed by Lomov, Abulhanova, Antsiferova, and other Soviet psychologists to social relations made it possible to include the topic of the dialogue in

Soviet psychology and to bring the figure of Bakhtin to light within that psychology. Regarding Bakhtin's inclusion in the discussion of the matter of dialogue, Lomov said the following:

"Units" of communication appear as cycles that express the interrelations of positions, orientations and points of view of each of the participants of the communication process. In such a process, reciprocal links in the flow of circulating information determine a fissure. According to Bakhtin, the unit of dialog is "a world in two voices." (Lomov, 1981, p. 6; my translation from Russian)

Unlike Vygotsky (specifically between 1928 and 1931) and Leontiev in his formulation of Activity theory, Lomov centered on the new psychical processes that emerged during communication rather than on the instrumental function of communication. Some Russian authors who were associated with different theoretical positions (Matusov, 2011; Smirnov, 1993; Smirnova, 1996) emphasized this critique of the instrumental path taken by Soviet psychology in its treatment of communication:

People's social relations are essentially instrumental and that is why higher mental functions are a result of the internalization of these social relations or in Vygotsky's own words, "genetically [i.e., developmentally], social relations, real relations of people, stand behind all of the higher functions and their relations . . . [T]he mental nature of man represents the totality of social relations internalized" (cited in Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007, p. 54). People need each other because they by themselves are defective, limited, and incomplete with regard to accomplishing their goals (Matusov, 2011, p. 102–103).

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The dialogical approach to the study of the human psyche goes in the opposite direction of the pillars on which an individualistic, instrumental, and natural approach became dominant within the official versions of Soviet psychology.

Lomov, Abulhanova, Antsiferova, and Bruslinsky signaled those limitations in terms of some of the main concepts of general psychology in the light of the principles of Activity theory. On this issue, Lomov wrote the following:

Unfortunately, the inquiries into the psyche as reflection are reduced to the study of the processes of knowledge, and among them, those that are related to phys-

ical object and their interrelations [here the author is making a direct reference to activity theory]. Following this orientation, the perception and understanding of persons in their reciprocal relationships are studied in partial manners. For us, it seems essential to study the multiplicity of psychical processes as reflection and to include the more complex formation of personality that forms and develops itself in the social life. (Lomov, 1984, p. 309, emphasis added; my translation from Russian)

Questioning the narrow definition of reflection that prevailed in Soviet psychology, particularly in its activity theory version, Lomov called for further advances in the study of psychological functions as functions of personality and for the identification of manners in which to use the concept of reflection in this complex matter. Lomov advocated a social psychology that was grounded simultaneously in multiple levels of the social organizations and events and in personality as the more complex representation of the individual psyche that was available in Soviet psychology at that time. In doing so, Lomov attempted again to combine topics that were being worked on separately in that psychology and whose unity represented one additional step in overcoming the split between social realities and individuals.

The new emphasis on dialogue, communication, and the subject of social processes in Soviet psychology allowed authors to embrace approaches and topics that had been omitted by that psychology for many years. A new psychology that centered on dialogue and on a new representation of the social system in which the individual is inseparable from the social phenomena was emerging in the 1970s in Soviet psychology.

The concept of subject (Abulhanova, 1973) did not receive a high level of development in Soviet times, but it did open a path that Bruslinsky strongly developed in the 1990s (Bruslinsky, 1994). However, the use of the term by Soviet psychologists remained aside from the discussion of some of the more important theoretical consequences of the concept for the development of psychology. The subject implies that the individual is in his or her active and generative position. The subject is a condition for understanding subjectivity as a living process that integrates the decisions and paths taken by the individual and social instances during ongoing activity. (Gonzalez Rey, 2002, 2012, 2015)

Despite the fact that Vygotsky never overcame completely his view of the social environment as the plot of immediate external influences, in his final works he did not understand social influences as external influences that become internal through internalization, but rather as participants of a new qualitative psychical formation, that is, *perezhivanie*, which he defined as a refraction rather than a reflection (Vygotsky, 1994). However, the term *refraction* represented a discrete advance in relation to reflection because social influences change their courses only through personality. Therefore, no new quality emerges in this process. The vagueness of his definition about the psychological nature of *perezhivanie* did not permit Vygotsky to advanced further regarding the relevance of this concept for psychological theory.

The institutionalization of the cultural-historical approach in Western countries assumed several concepts to be common to Vygotsky and A. N. Leontiev, and these concepts were taken as the “crystallized principles” on which the “Cultural, Historical, Activity Approach” was based. Mediation and internalization were among those concepts that became myths in this tradition. Both of these concepts characterized the more instrumental moment of Vygotsky’s work.

Mediation supported splits between function, sign, and environment, whereas *perezhivanie*, as defined by Vygotsky, represented a unity that emerges as an expression of personality in any given social situation. On this point, Yarochevsky (2007) emphasized that *perezhivanie* represents a new unit for the comprehension of personality. The concept of mediation should be overcome following this line of thinking, and consequently, reflection should be replaced by the idea of self-generative units in personality, which is relevant for the psychical processes that emerge as a result of a person’s experience in social life.

Mediation, psychological functions, and internalization formed a triangle that sustained the instrumental version of a naturalistic and individual psychology. These concepts are embedded in an objective psychology. In this triangle, the psychological functions were represented as internal operations whose geneses were rooted in the external world with internalization as the mechanism by which the external operations become internal, properly psychical operations.

If sign is a mediator, then it is external to the psychical operation. It is understood as an instrumental device between psychical operations, and external reality. The concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense as defined by Vygotsky at the end of his work represented a first step of a different logic; the advance on self-dynamic systems within which the world gains relevance to the person not as an external reality but through personality. Based on this definition, the subject-object scheme as the center of instrumental psychology was transcended, which was never explicitly assumed by Vygotsky.

The idea of social relationships is key for understanding the genesis of the complex human subjective systems and was completely overlooked in the instrumental version of Soviet psychology. The understanding of subjectivity as a new quality of human processes configured within the symbolical human existence that have historically been located within sociocultural systems breaks down the representation of social reality as an external given ambient.

Social instances are configured as subjective system of relationships and practices that are subjectively configured at two simultaneous and different levels, that is, as social experiences per se and as individual subjective configurations of the individuals who share this social scenario (González Rey, 2002, 2014, 2015). The consequences of advancing this path imply that there are no direct and immediate relationships between external reality and internal psychological processes in human experience.

Human experience occurs as a process in which the external and internal are configured as new psychological units that are formed by symbolical processes and emotions, and which unfold one into another to lead to the emergence of new subjective units both in the individuals and in the social instances in which their activities occur (González Rey, 2002, 2012, 2014). The assumption that human experience is such a subjective process within which the “human world” is continuously created and modified does not need mediators but rather requires effective partners in relation with each other.

The relationships between communication, dialogue, and subjects in processes led Abulhanova, Lomov, and Bruschlinsky to introduce the topic of subjectivity at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Chudnovsky (1988) also discussed this topic in the same period.

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Curiously, despite belonging to different theoretical trends in Soviet psychology, these authors shared common critiques of the instrumental psychology represented by activity theory in the 1960s and 1970s.

Despite the important steps that were oriented toward the construction of a more complex dialogical psychology, the growing interest in social relations, dialogue, and subject only indirectly drew attention to the concept of subjectivity. Some of the theoretical pieces that were needed to further advance the topic of subjectivity were not available at that moment within Soviet psychology. In Soviet philosophy, and consequently in Soviet psychology, the matter of the symbolic entered into discussions in a highly moderated manner.

Zinchenko noted the following:

There was the narrow idea of the mediation, mediation of human development. Among all of the broad possible mediators, we find in Vygotsky only two. He and his followers mainly studied the role of the sign and word in the development of the higher psychological functions. Symbol practically was absent from cultural–historical psychology. In general the role of the myths in the human development was not studied. (Zinchenko, 1993, p. 5; my translation from Russian)

In the last moment of his career, Davydov began to stress the relevance of emotions and personality. He had not given relevance to these terms in his prior works. Together with these topics, Davydov brought to light the topic of the symbolical to Soviet psychology. However, the irrelevance of this topic to Soviet psychology led to the ignoring of the relevant contribution of Davydov both in Russia and in the West. Davydov stated the following: “The creation of new images and things always implies a creative act of the individual that is possible by the interactions between individual capacities, such as imagination, symbolical replacement and thinking. In their interrelations, individual creative possibilities are supported” (Davydov, 1992, p. 25).

The narrow comprehension of the symbolic was a great limitation to achieving new aims in the discussion of subjectivity, although all of the conditions had been created to advance this matter in Soviet psychology. Subjectivity as an intrinsic part of that complex plot of cultural, social, and historical elements within which human experiences occur was a subversive novelty within a psychology that was centered on

action, cognition, and behavior as instrumental processes. Culture is a subjective historical production that appears to be a natural, objectified reality for the new human generations that are born within it. However, the development of each new human generation is characterized by the emergence of new subjectivities and is responsible for the cultural changes that each generation must face during its lifetime.

Subjectivity becomes a key element for explaining the permanent, dynamic and recursive system of person-culture. Culture is subjective in its own nature (symbolic-emotional processes, formations, myths, and institutions) and its objectivity is an illusion provoked by those processes and facts that are naturalized as “human reality.”

Culture as such was reduced in Soviet psychology to the topics of language, speech, and artificial mediators. Culture was related to devices and functions, but how the individual as such is a cultural production and a producer of culture was never explicitly explained.

The Turning Point in Consciousness and Subjectivity in Cultural–Historical Psychology: New Challenges and the Unfolding of the Cultural–Historical Matrix

The first problems to be dealt with in the development of the concept of subjectivity in cultural–historical-psychology were the dichotomies of “objectiveness-subjectivity,” “natural-individual,” and “natural-social.” These dichotomies prevailed in the path taken by Soviet psychology and largely continue in present time of mainstream “Vygotskian studies.”

Subjectivity exists implicitly in different philosophical traditions that include Phenomenology, Pragmatism, Marxism, and Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms. When taken separately, none of these approaches can be used as an isolated theoretical source for the development of subjectivity within the cultural–historical approach. In each of these approaches, it is possible to identify gaps that should be filled by the development of new topics and pathways that would allow the advancement of the topic of subjectivity from a cultural—historical standpoint. Along each of these philosophical traditions, many different paths have unfolded and are occasionally contradictory with one another. Philosophy and

psychology are not directly and immediately linked and, as such, it is not possible to transform philosophical assumptions into psychological principles.

During Soviet times, Marxism was officially assumed to be the philosophical basis of cultural–historical psychology. This was not only a theoretical option but also a political fact, which is frequently ignored today when many authors continue to identify Marxism as the “unique” philosophical basis of the cultural–historical theory without specifying a different interpretation of Marxism in relation to the Soviet version of Marxism. This dogmatic and sectarian position has not permitted the elaboration of the current challenges that have unfolded as part of the cultural–historical legacy. In my view, one of these challenges is the development of the topic of subjectivity and its epistemological and methodological consequences.

All of the philosophical trends mentioned above and many of their representatives have contributed significant insights to thought about the subjective side of every human phenomenon. Marxism gained a privileged place in the genesis of this approach for two main reasons: (a) the historical moment within which that approach emerged in the Soviet Union; and (b) the “Marxist turning point” in which the human essence was conceptualized as an organization that was socially and historically situated. However, Radzihovsky (1988) recognized the following:

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All of 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. (p. 126; my translation from Russian)

Marx’s original thought was not supported by the main official discourse in Soviet psychology in which a mechanical interpretation of Marxism prevailed. This main official discourse was a narrow representation of the reflection and the mechanical representation of reality as something given externally. As Shotter (2012) noted while stressing the distortive character of ideology as the lenses through which we see the “reality.”

From our perspective, subjectivity is engendered within symbolic practices and processes that are culturally and historically located. Subjectivity is intrinsic to the cultural character of human social life; it is not an exclusive type of process that belongs to an “intra-psychical mind.” It is a human process, whether social or individual, which involves emotions and symbolic processes that integrate with one another in new subjective units. This is the reason that I refer to social and individual subjectivities in this paper. The relationship between these two forms of subjectivity is not characterized as one being external to the other; there is not a cause-effect connection between them. Social and individual subjectivities are configured as two different systems, one social and the other individual. However, each of these systems is permanently configured into the other through the subjective senses that emerge during the processes in which both subjectivities are simultaneously configured as part of any human experience. Culture never appears as something external to be internalized; rather, it appears through many different subjective senses that are continuously emerging and unfolding as the ongoing subjective configurations that define human experience.

The symbolic-emotional social subjective configurations within which individual actions are inscribed permit the understanding of the presence of the other through the multiple subjective individual configurations through which social discourses, norms, representations, and feelings always define an “imaginary other” that is inseparable from the one that is physically interacting with us at the present moment. The individual subjective configuration of one concrete relation to another person and the subjective configuration of any human performance always generate subjective senses that embody social subjectivity within a dialogical structured communication whose course always implies new unfolding subjective processes.

The “plurality” of persons, situations, and historical moments of each concrete individual history can be integrated only imaginarily at the present time through the individual’s ongoing subjective configurations. The emotional symbolic units (i.e., the subjective senses and subjective configurations), due to their malleable character and complexity, are able to comprise

the present, past, and future of any human life in each particular performance.

Cassirer (1946/1953) stated the following:

Man lives with *objects* only in so far as he lives with these forms [the author is referring to symbolic forms]; he reveals reality to himself and himself to reality in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium in which the two do not merely make contact but fuse with each other. (p. 10, emphasis added)

Recognizing symbolic productions and reality as not being external to one another is crucial for overcoming the subject-object dichotomy on which Soviet psychology defined some of its main concepts and principles. This psychology largely supported the prevalence of the external, objective given reality over subjective, creative performances.

Symbolic social productions organize themselves as units within which the rupture between external and internal is not possible. The subjective configurations embody the spirit of the unit as Vygotsky used it. Rather than psychical functions, subjective configurations are the core of human subjectivity and permit one to advance the generative, productive character of human subjectivity. In advancing such a position, Cassirer also considered emotions as central processes for human symbolic production. Cassirer (1946/1953) stated,

Such ideas [the author is referring to the genesis of the myth], no matter how [they] manifest, how varied, how heterogeneous they appear at first sight, have their own inner lawfulness; they do not arise from a boundless caprice of the imagination but move in definite avenues of feeling and creative thought. (p. 15)

Cassirer and Bakhtin are similar to each other in some respects. Although Cassirer emphasized the subject of symbolic productions in a manner that integrated feelings and human creativity, Bakhtin produced something similar in his definition of another important symbolic process, that is, dialogue. Bakhtin said, “the world, where the act takes place, is a unique and integral world, concretely felt (experienced), visible, audible, palpable, perceptible and thinkable, all of them penetrated by a volitional-emotional tone” (as cited in A. A. Leontiev, 2001, p. 66).²

The penetration of a volitional-emotional tone, to which Bakhtin referred in the quotation above, is more than a “penetration.” This penetration is a metaphor that refers to a process

that should be considered as a complex subjective production within which the visible, palpable, perceptible, and thinkable emerge through a unique and new quality whose distinctive feature is being a symbolic-emotional unit within which the sensorial information has turned into a subjective production. The point here is not to neglect the sensorial level but to note a new qualitative level of human processes and the subjective character of this level, which represents a new type of phenomena that definitively differentiates the human psyche from animals.

The dialogical field represents the system within which human relations and actions occur. Shotter (2012) stated the following:

Again, due to our spontaneously responsive relations to events occurring within our meetings with others, instead of one person first acting individually and independently of any other, and then a second person replying also individually and independently of the first, we act jointly as a collective-we in an intra-action within which all are immersed. And we do this bodily, in a “living” way, spontaneously, without our first having “to work out” cognitively how to respond to each other. (p. 142)

Our comprehension of subjectivity as a process within a dialogical scenario shares the ideas that persons act jointly and that dialog is a fluid process within which many unexpected situations emerge, which permanently implies new positions, subjective senses and ideas in the partners, in a process in which questions and answers are not two separated processes. Both question and answers are part of the endless process within which the shared dialogical constructions are newly emergent productions that are always beyond individual control and consciousness. Dialog is a generative field with its specific processes that always implies new

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² According to Professor T. Bubnova, who is working at the Autonomous University of México and who made the translation of this book from Russian to Spanish, the author of the book was not Bakhtin as currently believed by many researchers all over the world, but rather Voloshinov, who belonged to the Bakhtin circle and was his closest collaborator for short period of time due to his early death. According to Bubnova—and this fact is also referred by V. Zinchenko (2009)—at the end of his life, Bakhtin categorically rejected any relation with Marxism. This fact could explain his refusal to admit his authorship of this book and any type of participation in its elaboration. However, I decided to keep the quotation as being from Bakhtin because he is the author referred in the original writing from which I took the quotation.

agentive positions in those involved in the process.

Therefore, the difference of my position from dialogical psychology is to reduce the individual's involvement in dialog to merely one more agent of this process. The individuals who assume active positions during dialog are not simple agents who emerge during this process. Individuals can turn into active subjects configured as a constituent and active agent of the dialog in a process in which they are never exhausted by the dialog because they as subjects bring to the dialogue the "microcosmos" of their entire life through the subjective senses and subjective configurations that are inseparable from their creations in the dialogue.

Shotter seems to signalize the nature of the individual as one of the agents of the dialog, that is, "we might *orient* ourselves bodily towards events occurring around us. How can we relate ourselves to them, and *get ourselves ready* for seeing, hearing, experiencing, and valuing what we encounter as we move forward with our lives" (Shotter, 2012, p. 142). I interpret his statement that "we orient ourselves bodily towards events occurring around us" to be his consideration of the complex organizations of all of the individual spheres of the individuals to the experiences lived by them that make it impossible to separate an individual's dimensions from social experiences.

Rather than be ruled by the social influences that come from the immediate social environment, subjectivity organizes itself as a complex configuration of subjective senses that is characterized by a chain of processes in which symbolical processes and emotions emerge together as a new quality that differs from all of the processes that participate in its genesis. These symbolic-emotional units specify the ontological character of human experience.

Subjectivity is not a product and is not an epiphenomenon of the "objective world;" rather, subjectivity represents a new system of human reality that is characterized by its own production. Subjectivity is always configured within structured dialogical networks and always represents a generative system within the intertwined flow of many unfolding avenues that are generated during the dialogue. However, not all human relations are dialogically structured. All human systems generate normative social patterns against which only the emer-

gence of the subject and its subjective productions are able to forge new paths.

Subjectivity configures cultural acts and processes per se; that is, culture is a subjectively produced system. Only the generative quality of subjectivity keeps the culture alive and determines the existence of a recursive process through which each of those acts and processes is intrinsic to the development of the other. This living process is impossible to capture in any static definition of culture as something given objectively.

Once Foucault introduced the concept of discourse as practice, a "discursive turning point" characterized a new moment for the social sciences and for psychology. Without doubt, the discursive dimension of human practices permitted the denaturalization of the representation of the psyche and behavior that characterized most of the psychology of the first half of the XX century. However, the replacement of the subjectivity by the idea of discursive practices engulfed the richness and diversity of the human phenomena in such a manner that individuals and other social agencies that historically emerged as social subjects completely lost their generative and creative character.

Facing the current situation of philosophy and the social sciences, the topic of subjectivity as discussed in this article emerges as a means to consider the symbolic-emotional nature of both social and individual human processes and realities to preserve the generative and creative productions of human agency. The advancement of these general assumptions demands a new system of concepts and the inauguration of a new field within the cultural-historical approach. The concept of subjectivity, in one manner or another, has much in common with what other authors have created in other theoretical frameworks (Castoriadis, 1995; Elliot & Frosh, 1985; Parker, 2011). Other important steps have been taken by authors, such as Burman, (2015), who have advanced new paths based on the relations between different theoretical references.

The advent of subjectivity as defined above represents not only a new term but also a new theoretical representation that implies new meanings for old concepts and new concepts that signal new processes. Subjectivity emerges as part of a dialogical-generative representation of human processes; it moves forward in the

direction completely opposite to that of the instrumentalist-natural paradigm that largely dominated Soviet psychology. The definition of psychological functions as subjectively configured is unattainable through concepts comprised of the primary character of external reality as the source of psychological functions. It is not possible to use concepts, such as internalization, reflection or mediation, to explain the complex functioning and development of psychological functions as subjective configurations. These conceptions are a remnant of the mechanistic materialism that was imposed over Soviet sciences for ideological reasons.

Cultural experiences always occur through cultural and symbolic definitions that in psychology, have primarily gained intelligibility through concepts, such as social representations and discursive practices. However, the theories that introduced these important concepts marking new moments in the construction of social human realities did not consider subjectivity or the subjects of these processes. Consequently, the richness of imagination, emotions, and fantasy was kept apart from human life and the creative, active, and generative position of the individual subject as the main actor and agent of social life were not prioritized enough in those theoretical accounts.

Human experiences are subjectivized through a complex plot of subjective senses within subjective configurations that whether individual or social, embody the plurality that unfolds through the sociocultural constructions on which human life occurs. The manner in which sociohistorical experiences are lived by individuals and the social instances always results from the subjective configurations emerge in the course of these very experiences. Expectations, feelings, and other subjective productions that result from the individual subjective system can be defined as personality. Here, personality is not understood as a determinant of human behavior but rather as a dynamic source of subjective senses in the context of action.

The core subjective configurations that should be considered to be personality are different for each individual regardless of how similar any two individuals' shared social experiences might be. Sociocultural symbolic productions, such as mother, man, woman, love, god, moral, race, gender, political values, and so forth, are subjectively configured in close rela-

tion to each other through the more relevant systems of affective relationships and performances in each individual.

Burman detailed a very interesting example of a kiss given to a child as a “trigger” of subjective feelings in the classroom. Her explanation of this process is similar to what I consider the subjective configuration of experience.

From this perspective, therefore, the kiss is not merely an epiphenomenon of the interaction as a dispensable or overlook-able figure, but perhaps is a vital bodily activity—an activity that crossed and connects bodies and even substitutes bodies (. . .). Rather, as a gesture, the kiss functions at the intersection of, and mediates between, the field of action and symbolization (. . .). Sure, this gesture is a “*miniaturization of a whole set of affective engagements built from other contexts and relationships of authority and attachment*” (. . .) but, as other gestures, it has become detached from a specific context and relationships and is now mobilizable in this different setting (Burman, 2015, p. 190, emphasis added).

Explaining the example given by Burman through our theoretical lens, it is possible to state that each subjective configuration could be represented as a “miniaturization of a whole set of affective engagements” that result from other contexts and relationships. This set of affective engagements emerge at the present moment as subjective senses that are responsible for the feelings and symbolic expressions that the kiss provokes in the child. The term *miniaturization* can be understood here as a metaphor used by Burman to signal the complex plot of emotions and symbolical processes that “synthesized” the complex settings of prior moments and the current moments of the child’s life.

In my opinion, the topic of subjectivity will open new dialogues between cultural-historical-oriented psychology and other approaches that are also oriented toward a cultural understanding of subjectivity. S. Kirschner (2013) stated the following:

In recent years, many cultural and critical psychologists along with other social researchers have sought to theorize a subjectivity that is not only socioculturally constituted but also experiential, embodied and singular (Biehl, Good, & Kleinman, 2007; Blackman, Cromby Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008; Fox Keller, 2007; Ortner, 2005). Such expanded accounts of subjectivity have opened new dimensions of theory and inquiry. They have accomplished this, in

part, by reviving and extending approaches (such as phenomenology and psychoanalysis) that had been sidelined for decades by the discursive turn. (pp. 225–226)

There is not a single area of psychology that can remain unaffected by the theoretical and epistemological advances in the study of subjectivity from the new cultural–historical perspective. It is not possible to advance new topics based on the old concepts on which the original cultural–historical theory was based.

Final Remarks

The foundation of the cultural–historical approach in the beginning of the Soviet period was a plural and contradictory enterprise that was interrupted in the middle of the 1920s by the dominance of the materialistic interpretation over idealistic positions in psychology. Since that time, Marxist psychology has been identified as a natural and objective psychology in which social is identified as external social influences, external social-given objects, and external operations with objects. The more extreme position in that search for objectivity was achieved by activity theory in the identification of psychological processes as internal activities.

The 1970s saw the decline of activity theory and the advent of a new theoretical and political force in Soviet psychology. The main pillars on which Soviet psychology was sustained for decades were severely criticized. Topics that were excluded for long times, such as communication, dialogue, subject, and subjectivity, began to emerge as the foci of debate and gained important theoretical and methodological relevance.

The decline of the objective-instrumental paradigm in Soviet psychology progressively gave way to a dialogical-dialectical approach. On this basis, the definition of social reality became enriched to affect not only the development of a social psychology that did not previously exist but also generate new questions and new theoretical avenues in general psychology. The redefinition that occurred in Soviet psychology under these new circumstances also extended to its history and allowed for the emergence of new interpretations of its classics.

This article based itself on the legacy of Soviet psychology to advance a new definition of subjectivity, and sought to advance the close

relationship between subjectivity, social realities and culture. In this attempt, a dialogue with authors who are traditionally omitted by the mainstream cultural, historical, activity theory can be opened.

Subjectivity is understood as the complex flow of subjective senses and subjective configurations that characterize all human processes and facts. It is a constituent of the complex social networks, dialogical or not, within which human experiences occur. Furthermore, it is a constituent of human experience that is constituted in its course.

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