

Chapter 9

Advances in Subjectivity from a Cultural-Historical Perspective: Unfoldings and Consequences for Cultural Studies Today

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Abstract This chapter outlines a general picture of the phenomenon of subjectivity in Soviet psychology. In order to do this, the author organised a non-conventional group of authors, who came from different traditions of Soviet psychology and made important contributions for development of the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint. These traditions that historically were presented as excluded to one another, by the classical soviet's official historiography, are discussed in their point of contact and in their complementation as the basis for developing a new representation of subjectivity. It also presents the turn toward the study of the consciousness and symbolical realities of authors who appeared as being followers of the Activity Theory in early moments of their work (Davydov 2002; Zinchenko 2009). After drawing such a picture about the phenomenon of Soviet psychology related to the antecedents of subjectivity, the author develops on his theoretical proposal about subjectivity. He develops a representation of subjectivity as a system that permits to understand how the historical experiences and the simultaneous contexts of the individual current's life experiences appear together in a new units of subjectivity, defined by the author in the intertwined movements between subjective configurations and subjective senses. Finally it discussed the relevance of dialogue for this proposal about subjectivity. On this matter, the author establishes the differences between this proposal and those that characterise the dialogical psychology.

9.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of some of the more relevant antecedents of the topic of subjectivity in Soviet psychology, as a result of which a new psychological culture began to emerge at the end of the 1970s. Based on these antecedents, I

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advance a theoretical proposal regarding subjectivity from a cultural and historical basis. Different positions within Soviet psychology contributed to the topic of subjectivity from different angles and with different topics. The topics and times through which different Soviet authors contributed to advances in subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint were diverse and complemented one another beyond the intentions of the authors. However, some of these authors were presented as contradictory to one another because of the perspectives and interests by which the history of Soviet psychology was constructed during the Soviet era.

Concepts such as dialogue, communication, personality, sense, *perezhivanie*, subject, social situation of development, unity of consciousness and activity, and consciousness developed by some different soviet psychological traditions, are complementary in the attempt to move forward on the topic of subjectivity at the present time. The aforementioned concepts in their interrelation inspired the position about subjectivity that is discussed in this chapter, bringing to light authors like Vygotsky, Rubinstein, Bozhovich, Ananiev and Bakhtin, as well as some of their disciples like Abuljanova, Bruschlinsky, Lomov and Chudnovsky, who had important point of contacts that gain intelligibility within a new historical interpretation. The historical interpretations are always closely related to the dominant theories that appear ruling certain historical moments. There are the dominant concepts and representations of the subjects of those theories direct the perspectives from which history is interpreted. Because the psychologists and theories that actively contributed to the topics mentioned above were not dominant within the political scenario of Soviet psychology, their contributions to that psychology appear distorted.

The present chapter presents other paths for interpreting that history, emphasising the manner in which these paths complement one another in their various efforts to advance a new theoretical paradigm within Soviet psychology. The topic of subjectivity at present includes that hidden legacy of Soviet psychology among its antecedents.

9.2 The Relevant Legacy of Soviet Psychology for the Study of Subjectivity from a Cultural-Historical Standpoint

The different movements and tendencies that develop in the study of history do not represent objective concepts that are presented once and then remain forever. These movements always represent relative historical paths of intelligibility in one historical moment. History incorporates new theoretical constructions to generate new understandings regarding facts whose existence was ignored by previous theories. This process is what renders new interpretations of the history possible. Such a scenario occurred in the history of Soviet psychology and the versions of that psychology that remain popular in Western psychology. Some relevant works of

relevant authors of Soviet psychology are not prominent in Western psychology even after decades of having been published in English because of dominant Western positions toward Soviet authors. Among the authors whose critical positions have been ignored are Leontiev (1992), Davydov (1999), Bozhovich (2009) and Zinchenko (1995, 2002a, b, 2009).

The same process of excluding relevant authors occurred inside Soviet psychology, in which many important contributions were relegated by decades and did not resurface until recently. Russian psychology represents an amalgam of a variety of movements, many of which are updates of old psychological traditions of world psychology, such as psychometrics, to which many books in Russia are currently devoted. Despite this general picture, the primary traditions of Soviet psychology remain alive and in development in the more relevant journals and institutions of Russian psychology.

This section considers authors grouped by their relevance to the study of subjectivity. In different historical moments, these authors made significant contributions to Soviet and Russian psychology. The groups are organised according to my interest in the portions of their contributions that have mostly been overlooked.

The first group is the Vygotsky–Bozhovich dyad. Vygotsky, in the first and last moments of his work (González Rey 2011), introduced extremely promising concepts for advancing a new understanding of consciousness, personality and psychological development. These concepts were overlooked for decades in Soviet psychology. The relevant concepts are **sense** (Leontiev 1992; González Rey 2000, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014; Zinchenko 2009), **perezhivanie** (Bozhovich 2009a; Fakhrutdinova 2010; Fleer and Quiñones 2013; González Rey 2002, 2009, 2011, 2012; Rodríguez Arocho 2010; Smagorinsky 2011; Yarochevsky 2007) and **social situation of development** (Bozhovich 2009a; Fleer and Chen 2015; Hedegaard 2012; González Rey 1995, 2009, 2012). The concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* comprise the complex psychological units related to consciousness, personality and psychological development, and the social situation of development aimed at relativising the role of immediate social influences on child development. Combining these concepts with other ideas from Vygotsky's "Psychology of Art", such as the unity between emotion and imagination being the same process (Vygotsky 1965), a perception of the first Vygotsky's theoretical agenda emerged that was essentially different from the agenda that he developed during his instrumental period between 1927 and 1931 (Leontiev 1984, 1992; González Rey 2011).

Bozhovich was the only author who advanced the legacy of Vygotsky in the study of personality, motivation and human development in Soviet psychology. In fact, the main concepts discussed by Vygotsky in "Psychology of Art" and in his works in 1933 and 1934, were largely ignored by the disciples of Vygotsky. These disciples clustered around Leontiev in the Cathedra of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Moscow after Rubinstein was replaced because of accusations regarding his ideological deviation, in which Leontiev and Galperin actively participated (Brushlinky 2001).

Bozhovich transcended Vygotsky's legacy, emphasising the independence and generative character of personality:

Children may therefore strive to once again relive something they experienced previously that became appealing to them. In this case, *perezhivanie* is transformed from being a means of orientations into a goal in itself and leads to the emergence of new needs—needs for *perezhivaniya*¹ themselves. But in this regard as well *perezhivaniya* are not the exception. In the process of development the entire human mind ceases to be a mere apparatus of orientations and adaptation. Gradually, it takes on independent importance and is transformed into a special form of its subject's life. (Bozhovich 2009b, pp. 74–75)

Bozhovich's statement emphasises the subjective character of human personality; if individuals "relive something that [they] experienced previously," it indicates that the individual subjectively lived that experience through the *perezhivanie* evoked in the present moment. Bozhovich repeatedly stressed the generative character of personality in that book:

...psyche represents a type of reality that can influence both the course of the subjective and of objective processes. Without the recognition of this, it appears to us that it is not possible to understand or study the personality or its functions in the interrelations of the individual and the world. Personality not only permits the stability and independence of the individual from the immediate influences that surrounded him/her but to some extent renders the individual the creator of itself and of the world in which the individual lives. (Bozhovich 2009a, p. 126; my translation from Russian)

Bozhovich further advanced Vygotsky's definition of social environment. Although the concept of communication as such was not treated in depth by the psychologists gathered around Vygotsky and Leontiev as Bozhovich was, Bozhovich defined the fascinating concept of "internal position" that expresses a more complex core of the interrelated psychological features closely associated with the place of the child within the groups that surround that child. As Bozhovich stated:

We were required to introduce the concept of the place of the child among those who surrounded that child and the concept of internal position to which we came in the process of studying individual children, when in front of us stands the task of studying the individual features of their affective relation to reality and determining the conditions that influence the formation of these features. (Bozhovich 2009a, p. 142; my translation from Russian)

Bozhovich attempted to transcend the immediate external influences of the environment and understand the child's psychological features with regard to the system of the child's closest social relations that in Bozhovich's opinion influenced the child's performance in school. The influences of such relations on the child must be deciphered through research. Bozhovich stated:

¹The plural form of *perezhivanie* in the Russian language was taken from Bozhovich's original text in Russian. The entire quotation was compared with the original Russian work.

For example, if children's position within the family and in school, the attitude of other children within the family, and children's own personalities are assessed by those around them based on academic success, and due to insufficient readiness for classroom learning or due to some other reason children are not able to achieve this success, as our laboratory's research demonstrates, they may have a strong affective reaction to these circumstances and may have a negative attitude toward learning, and sometimes toward school. (Bozhovich 2009b, p. 76)

Bozhovich here integrated into the explanation of one type of a child's behaviour two different social spaces of its life, school and family, considering the relationships of a child with other children within the family, etc. However, in so doing, the author did not transcend the immediate comprehension of social relationships as the main unit of the child's social life. Bozhovich considered family and school to be concrete systems of interrelations, as if these social instances could be reduced to the interactions among their members.

In her analysis, Bozhovich omitted that school is only one of the social moments within a child's life. The subjective nature of children's failure is configured by the cosmos of their singular histories, intertwined with the diversity of their current lived experiences. In this sense, it is impossible to define which social spaces are responsible for school failure: social spaces are not responsible for our behaviour; our behaviour results from the subjective configurations that emerge within social experiences.

The logic that supports the unilateral relation between social relationships and behaviour that prevailed in Soviet psychology resulted from the principle of the social determinism of psychological processes that ruled psychology in Russia. Despite Bozhovich's recognising the generative character of personality, by which she defended the important principle of the independence of personality from immediate external influences, Bozhovich, in fact, sought to identify, through family and school, the social reasons that explain the psychological nature of children's behaviour regarding school failure.

The tradition of thinking that developed between the last moment of the legacy of Vygotsky and was advanced by Bozhovich, who decisively advanced the psychological nature of the formations of personality, was an important antecedent of our work regarding subjectivity. Nevertheless, these positions did not lead to significant progress toward a different comprehension of the integration of the individual as an active instance of the social processes. We must remember that the tradition of Moscow, primarily represented by the positions of Vygotsky and Leontiev, essentially addressed the development of general psychology.

The decades-long omission of the category of communication from Soviet psychology did not permit advances in the study of the complex and specific processes of communication, particularly not on its dialogical organisation. Communication as a particular category with its own processes began to be studied in Soviet psychology only after the death of Bozhovich (Lomov 1978, 1984; Gonzalez Rey 1983; Smirnov 1993; Smirnova 1996; among others).

E. Smirnova, who was a disciple of Lizina, the first psychologist who explicitly discussed communication within the framework of Theory of Activity, stated:

According to the position of Vygotsky, the social world of the adults that surround the children represent the necessary condition for human development...It is clear that this comprehension of the process of psychological development implies considering in the foreground the role of communication with adults. Therefore, for the proper author and his followers, the adult acts only as a mediator between the child and the culture, like an abstract "carrier" of signs, norms and forms of activity, but not as a live, concrete person. Despite the recognition by all of the role of communication with adults in the child's psychological development, the process of communication in itself was not the subject of research in the cultural-historical approach. (Smirnova 1996, p. 87; my translation from Russian)

Communication uncovers subjective processes whose study was not possible within the objective theoretical framework that prevailed in Soviet psychology until the 1970s. Therefore, this topic was advanced during the Soviet period by the strong group in Leningrad founded by Bechterev, who, despite his attempt to replace psychology as an independent discipline with reflexology, proposed a systemic approach to the relation between the human being and the social environment, recognising the complexity of human social processes (Valsiner 2001).

Bechterev's co-worker, Lazursky, was one of the founders of the study of personality in Soviet psychology. The "School of Leningrad" began to develop around Bechterev in Soviet psychology, whose main contributors after the Bechterev-Lazursky generation was Ananiev. Unlike Moscow's dominant tradition, the tradition of Leningrad always focused on the relation between personality and social processes.

Unlike the definition of social environment as an external system of influences over individuals, the line of thinkers formed by Ananiev, Miasichev, Lomov and Bodaliev (the last two disciples of the former), advanced simultaneously in social and general psychology. These Soviet authors also maintained the prominence of the cultural, historical and social genesis of the human psyche; however, their emphasis was on the communicative processes and the specific forms of communication generated by a wider representation of social functioning. The idea of an immediate social determinism from external operations and processes to internal was clearly questioned by Ananiev, who stated:

The general problem of social determination, unlike the more general problem of the causal conditioning of consciousness by the material world, includes in itself the quality of the individual as the subject of its activity in a process in which the individual also modifies the social environment. (Ananiev 1977, p. 152; my translation from Russian)

Ananiev stressed an important difference between social determination and the causal conditioning of the consciousness by the material world: social determination is not external to the subject. The individual as subject of his own social relations is also a producer of the social environment within which the person lives. Ananiev established a subtle difference between the principle considered the main problems of Marxist philosophy: the secondary character of the consciousness with regard to the material world and the social determination of the individual, a process that includes the subject himself in the social system.

In his definition of human relationships, Miasichev included individuals as subjects of their own social relationships but also advanced one important step: “The nature of inter-human relations is defined during the course of these relations, which is clear, but it does not depend only on them, but also on external conditions and the positions of the people in these relationships” (Miasichev 1960, p. 216; my translation from Russian). Continuing his explanation of what the external conditions indicate, Miasichev wrote:

Under conditions of free interaction between individuals, these relations can be authentic, but in conditions in which repression prevails, in conditions of the absence of freedom and of the dependency of one person on another, human relations are not authentic; they are hidden and masked”. (Miasichev 1960, p. 216)

Considering that Miasichev’s statements were written some years after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, during which criticism of Stalin was made public, it is evident that repression decreased during that period. However, the rules established by the group in power in psychology, the group headed by Leontiev, did not change. Only Leontiev’s rejection of Vygotsky can explain the late publication of “The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky” in the Russian language.

It was not by chance that the theoretical positions of the disciples of Rubinstein, Ananiev, Miasichev and Bozhovich were the first to make explicit the term *subjectivity* in Soviet psychology. Emphasising subjectivity elicited a different comprehension not only of personality but of the complex dialectic between social processes and personality (Abuljanova 1973, 1980; Brushlinsky 1994; Chudnovsky 1976, 1988; Lomov 1978, 1984). In the 1970s, the disciples of Rubinstein gathered around Lomov in the Institute of Psychology of the Academy of Sciences of the former Soviet Union, representing a new powerful institution inside Soviet psychology. The new winds blowing in Soviet psychology were also expressed in the “V Congress of the Society of Psychologists of the Soviet Union” held in 1977 in Moscow, whose central topic was the “Problem of Activity in Soviet Psychology”. Many of the more relevant psychologists and institutions of psychology from the Soviet Union were represented in that Congress (Galperin, Menshinskaya, Nepomnishaya, Brushlinsky, Pushkin and Talizina, among others).

That new political situation in the country and in psychology as well permitted an open discussion of questions that had remained shadowed for a long time; topics such as subjectivity, communication and the limitations of the Activity Theory were discussed during the Congress in an extremely open atmosphere. The topic of communication emerged with particular force. As Lomov stated,

Representing an essential part of the subject’s vital activity, communication is considered an important determinant of all psychical systems, of their 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)

Lomov's definition was crucial for advancing the topic of subjectivity in a cultural-historical theoretical framework. The psyche and communication are intrinsically related to one another because the processes that occur in one unfold into the other in many different manners. The individual and communication are not organised as external to one another, but are a unit entailing different psychological consequences for the partners of the communication and for the communication in itself. This complex and recursive comprehension of the social processes that consider the individual as an inseparable component of these processes was an important antecedent to the concept of social subjectivity that will be discussed below.

The characteristic tendency of Soviet psychology to avoid the definition of the psychological nature of its concepts was an attempt to ignore the subjective nature of human psychological processes engendered within the historical–social. With regard to the “ontological vacuum of Soviet psychology,” Abuljanova wrote,

Despite the fierce polemics between those addicted to a socio-psychological explanation of the psyche and the supporters of the physiological or cybernetic explanation, the position of groups is identical. The attempt to materialize the psyche or assign it materiality through its identification with something different reveals the anti-dialectical character of this form of knowledge, the inability to apply dialectic to the discovery of the specificity of psychic phenomenon. (Abuljanova 1973, p. 49; my translation from Russian)

The simultaneous advances of the generative and active character of personality (Abuljanova 1980; Abuljanova and Brushlinsky 1989; Bozhovich 2009a; Lomov 1978), combined with the recognition of communication as a specific process whose psychological nature recursively relates to the psychological structure of the individual, represented a solid and necessary precursor to advancing the topic of subjectivity in a cultural-historical framework. Thus, the tradition of the “Leningrad School” that advanced the first steps of a critical social psychology in Soviet times is paired in this chapter with the vigorous traditions represented by Vygotsky and Bozhovich and by the disciples of Rubinstein. All of these complementary approaches represent an important legacy in advancing the topic of subjectivity within this theoretical account.

At the end of their works, Zinchenko (1995, 2002a, 2009) and Davydov (1992, 1999, 2002), who followed the positions of the Activity Theory for decades, made an important change by bringing to the foreground issues of consciousness, personality and emotions. Davydov (1992) also made explicit the relevance of symbolic processes in understanding the creativity of the subject, an interest that aligned him with Brushlinsky in the last years of his life (Davydov 2002; Brushlinsky 2002).

The creation of new images and things is always considered as a creative act of the individual, developed by the interrelation of the individual capacities, such as imagination, symbolic replacement and thinking. In its coordination, these processes addressed, above all, guaranteeing the creative possibilities of the individual. (Davydov 1992, p. 25; my translation from Russian)

It is amazing that Davydov, who had never before quoted Bozhovich in his work, began the paper from which the previous quotation was taken with two quotations of Bozhovich referring to the independence of the child from immediate external influences after its first year of life. The emphasis on individuals as creative subjects, which stressed the role of emotions, imagination and symbolic processes in intellectual operations, was central to Davydov in his late works (Davydov 1992, 1999, 2002). In this last period of his life, Davydov was closer to Vygotsky and Bozhovich than to Leontiev.

With regard to the subjective nature of consciousness, Zinchenko stated,

To this day, consciousness is being reduced and, accordingly, identified with such phenomena as a distinctly apperceived image, a field of clear attention, the concept of short-term memory, the obvious result of an act of thought, apperception of one own self and so on. In all these cases true acts of consciousness are replaced by its external and often scanty results, that is, by various well known empirical phenomena that are accessible to self-observation. The inclusion of such phenomena in the ontology of consciousness may raise doubts because of their obvious subjectivity. (Zinchenko 2009, pp. 47–48)

Although subjectivity as such was not considered in its specific processes and formations as an open system, the concept began to refer to consciousness and to personality, categories previously established in the theoretical repertoire of Soviet psychology but never before recognised for their specific subjective character. Zinchenko's emphasis (2002b, 2009) on the definition of the ontological nature of consciousness represented an important attempt to overcome the ontological emptiness of Soviet psychology.

The tendencies of Soviet psychology represented by the authors discussed above advanced parallel to the positions of authors who began with psychoanalysis, overcoming the metaphysical dogmas of the works of Freud and Lacan, and bringing to light new forms of understanding subjectivity within the complex dynamics of social life and culture (Castoriadis 1995; Frosh 2002, 2010; and others).

Frosh defending the active subject formed within culture notes:

Put at its most simple, although this is a more complicated argument than it might seem, human subjects may be 'socially constructed', but from that constructed position they exert choices which are never quite reducible to the forces that constructed them in the first place. (Frosh 2002, p. 3)

Recognising the social genesis of the subject, Frosh also stressed its active character that transcends the immediate social conditions within which the individual is formed. The advancement of the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical perspective required opening a dialogue with different positions that at that moment shared an understanding of the complex relations among subjectivity, culture and social life. A consequent cultural-historical approach cannot encase a narrow repertoire of concepts that were the foundation of the theory at one historical moment.

9.3 The Cultural-Historical Approach in the Study and Advancement of Subjectivity

The defense of a new theoretical proposal for the study of subjectivity implies discussion and elaboration of topics that represent new avenues within historical-cultural psychology. The arguments that justify the study of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint are the following:

First, it is important to stress that the human being is the only animal that changes radically from one generation to the next, not only psychologically but also in relation to the world within which each generation lives. Culture is a symbolic system within which various human practices and normative systems foster life for the persons who share one particular culture. Symbolic realities are human productions that embody different histories that objectify themselves in language, discursive practices, social representations, myths, normative systems, religions and other cultural productions. Within these symbolic networks of cultural facts, individuals, institutions and groups develop their complex and singular subjective organisations, which represent truly subjective productions. In these productions, emotions are embedded within symbolic processes, which turn subjectivity into an intrinsic component of culture.

Second, subjectivity is not an intra-psychical phenomenon, but a qualitative characteristic of every human process, reality and system. Subjectivity is as simultaneously intrinsic to social functioning as to individual singular processes. Subjectivity is a distinctive psychological level of the cultural existence of humans.

Third, individuals and social functioning are culturally located subjective productions. However, individuals exist for a shorter time than the duration of cultural development. Therefore, each human generation is born within well-established cultural world that create the illusion of culture as being an objective world. Thus, each generation traces its own paths in its cultural world in such a manner that at the end of a person's life, the culture has radically changed.

Fourth, each human generation shares the same culture. However, each individual, group and institution subjectively lives in different ways within this culture because each generation's historical and singular trajectories are subjectively produced. Experiences are subjective productions rather than a reflection or assimilation of external facts, influences, or objects. Subjectivity is the distinctive characteristic of the historical character of individuals, groups, institutions and societies because subjectivity is the history of each of these instances and what makes each of them different from others within the same culture. Therefore, the study of subjectivity as human production intrinsically associated with cultural life implies developing concepts capable of understanding the complex subjective units that embody the different subjective trajectories of individuals and social instances within one culture.

Fifth, the simultaneous integration of experiences lived in different times and areas of life is possible only by complex subjective productions. Symbolic-affective social relationships are the basis for the emergence of emotions that respond to the symbolic devices that characterise these relations.

Various psychological theories advanced the study of symbolic processes and realities beyond the cultural-historical tradition (Davydov 1992; Zinchenko 1993). This is understandable because the social norms and realities established in the former Soviet Union were the expression of the concretisation of the laws of history, officially represented as “historical truth”. In this respect, the idea of control over human behaviour had a strong presence in Soviet psychology and education.

Some of the advanced theories in social psychology, such as the theory of social representations and social constructionism, emphasise the symbolic character of their proposals. Whereas social representations were defined as symbolic productions (Moscovici and Markova 1998; Jodelet 1989), social constructionism placed at the centre of its definition the concept of discursive relational practices. Despite the different tendencies of the two theories and the reciprocal criticism, both theories stress the symbolic character of social productions. However, neither of these theories focuses on the productive, generative and subversive character of individuals within the social symbolic networks in which human life occurs. The rescue of individuals as active subjects and agents of their own social practices renders them an inseparable component of the social networks within which their lives occur (González Rey 2015).

This proposal regarding subjectivity is grounded in two important theoretical premises: the integration of emotions and symbolic processes in a new type of psychological unit and the complex and recursive subjective configuration of social processes and individual psychological organisation during human experience. From our point of view, social instances are simultaneously subjective systems, within which one individual action unfolds into many social effects, which, recursively, are also configured in the individuals.

The key subjective units whose endless movement engenders other forms of subjective formations are the subjective senses. The subjective senses are the instantaneous emotional-symbolic units that characterise the flux of human experience as life is subjectively lived. Subjective senses are the paths by which the past and the diversity of present experiences lived by the individuals within different social instances are integrated into one subjective configuration.

The flow of subjective senses in its chaotic and endless movement generates subjective configurations: a self-generative formation of subjective senses. The subjective configurations appear in two closed interrelated levels, for instance, subjective configurations of personality and subjective configurations of action. Subjective configurations of personality, rather than being psychological determinants of action, appear in the process of an action through specific subjective senses generated in this process.

This definition of subjectivity leads to a rethinking of personality, understanding personality not as a unified autonomous system comprised of stable and universal traits, but as a dynamic system of subjective configurations that express the most relevant individual experiences as they are subjectively configured. Personality represents the historical moment of the individual during personal current action. The subjective configurations as self-generative subjective units constrain the free movement of the subjective senses during human experiences. Personality is a living

system that is configured in a specific manner within the subjective configuration of the action. Individual and social groups become subjects of their own actions when they are capable of assuming decisions and positions that open new paths within the normative social system within which human actions are developed.

The definition of the subject as was made explicit above is an important concept for the understanding of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint because the subject emerges as a living agency, whether social or individual, that actively generates new subjective senses during the action, a process that renders it possible to overcome any type of subjective determinism. The decisions, options and paths undertaken by the subject on the ongoing action are a source of subjective senses that stresses the subjective configurations of the action, leading to changes in their organisation. This proposal regarding the subject is different from that proposed by humanism because the subject of humanism is an intentional and rational entity able to exert self-conscious control of its actions.

The subjective senses are symbolic emotional units that exist in an endless movement within which some senses overlap with others and unfold into others, forming a subjective network. Within this network, the subjective configurations, movement engenders the dominant emotions, perceptions, thoughts, fears, fantasies and other dominant subjective states that characterise any psychological function. Human action is never an isolated instrumental action; action is subjectively configured during the action. The subjective configurations are the motivation of the complex blending of psychological processes that emerge during the subject's action within an ongoing experience (González Rey 2014).

In their complementary and contradictory functioning, the subjective senses and configurations integrate the multiple social symbolic productions that develop a subjective character during social relations, such as gender, race, beliefs, norms and other social symbolic productions. In this process, social subjectivity is configured into individual subjectivity in such a manner that social subjectivity becomes many singular paths, some of which appear to be processes of resistance and subversion of the dominant order whereas others unconditionally subordinate the individual to this order.

Soviet psychologists did not understand this complex intertwined dynamic between social reality and individual processes. Until the 1970s, Soviet psychology attributed psychological status only to individuals. The social order was understood as a given reality that should be assimilated rather than questioned. Thus, the more advanced examples of the definition of social reality were limited to the study of immediate relational systems such as the school and the family.

For example, the angry reaction of a child to a bad result in school, a topic whose psychological nature was first studied by Bozhovich and her colleagues, can never be exhausted by one analysis of the child's interaction within the family and the school as the author did. One child could be ashamed of his/her social condition in life, a feeling that may be configured by comments heard from the child's parent, by the manner in which the child perceives the teacher's relationship to him/her through the lenses of that feeling in such a process that at the end, we are far from what it is observable in the current circles of the child's relationships.

The subjective configurations in which the subject's action is embedded represent a relevant concept for understanding the psychological nature of the various individual psychological processes and behaviours, including those classified as mental disorders. The paranoid reaction classified as pathological is not particularly different from the reaction of the child embarrassed by his/her social status, in which the child perceives the positions of others through the lenses of the embarrassing situation. The paranoid individual does not react to the manner in which another person looks at him/her; the individual subjectively produces a perception grounded in his/her subjectivity that has little to do with what others are doing. This does not indicate that the individual is outside reality; it indicates that the individual responds to his/her subjective reality.

The processes mentioned above do not occur exclusively to persons with disorders, but to everyone. The difference is that the persons with disorders are completely dominated by those subjective experiences whereas the rest of us are capable of generating manners in which to live within the established normative system.

Considering that any mental disorder is culturally located within a system of social and institutional practices, persons are always labelled by institutions on the basis of dominant ideological values. Therefore, some persons are capable of generating new manners of subjectivation to address these labels whereas others remain submissive to the labels.

The concept of subjective configuration permits the study of the singular subjective nature of mental disorder on the basis of which therapeutic and the educational work should be oriented. One important goal of therapeutic and educational work is to facilitate new thoughts and emotions through dialogical communicational processes from which new subjective senses may emerge. Focus on the subjective configurations of mental disorders implies working with the persons, not the symptoms. Even in the case of more severe disorders such as schizophrenia, as was shown by Goulart's work (Goulart 2013), the dialogical interaction with the patients was an excellent resource to open new spaces of socialisation within which the patients began to generate new behaviours and subjective options in their daily lives.

Subjectivity is always a production, a manner in which to create our own realities, some of which are compatible with our processes of institutionalisation, development and socialisation whereas others qualify as disorders that do not permit the integration of the individuals into a social life nor the development of the self by alternative paths of life.

One of the primary subversive consequences of the recognition of the subjective character of human processes and realities is to overcome the unilateral rationalism that yet prevails in the analysis of human phenomena and the illusion of control that rules the majority of the institutions that are concerned with education and health. The increasing crisis in the world, the proliferation of "irrational acts" based on different subjectivities, which have complex historical roots, must contribute to understanding the need to advance new theoretical paths capable of advancing the explanation of how different subjectivities related to different cultures are associated with the emergence of human catastrophes.

Individuals live within subjective social networks that result from dominant social discourses, social representations and other social symbolic productions that are configured in different manners in the subjective configurations of their immediate systems of relations. These complex networks of social subjective productions configure social subjectivity. The concept of social subjectivity is addressed to understand the complex subjective configurations of the different social instances and systems of relationships within the more complex systems of social instances that define society. The recognition of a social subjectivity does not entail the definition of social realities as abstract carriers of subjectivity or as fixed entities presented beforehand as living social dynamics.

The concept of social subjectivity implies an understanding of any concrete social interactive space as configured by subjective senses that encloses social symbolic productions related to other social instances. The dominant social subjectivity indirectly appears in jokes, informal conversation and practices that sometimes contradict the ruling principles assumed by institutions as correct in a process that is beyond the consciousness of the workers of the institution.

9.4 The Dialogue as Subjective Process

There has been a gap between authors who share dialogical positions (Shotter 2012; Matusov 2011) and those centred on the traditional individual psychology. In their reaction and critique to that reductionist individual psychology, the authors centred on dialogue completely omitted the individual as subject of its social relationships, its complex subjective configuration formed as part of the social subjectivity, and its quality as an active creative agent of any dialogical structured relationships. The gap between dialogical and individual is overcome in the current theoretical proposal on subjectivity, in which social relationships and individuals are not treated as being external to each other, but as configured into each other. A dialogue between passive persons that do not become subjects of the dialogue is impossible. Together with the active and generative character of dialogue, the active and generative character of the subjects in dialogue is essential for the emergence of the dialogue. The dialogue and its subjects advance together without one being engulfed by the other, in a relation in which the dialogue is constantly configured in their subjects, and at the same time the dialogue is configured by the subjects' creative expression within the dialogue.

Moreno, a brilliant author that rarely appears in academic instances, stated:

Co-consciousness and co-unconsciousness states are by definition states that partners have experienced and produced together and that can therefore be reproduced or reenacted together. A co-conscious or co-unconscious state cannot be the property of one individual alone. It is always a common property that can only be reproduced by a joint effort. (Moreno 1994, p. vii)

Recognising the co-conscious and co-unconscious processes of the partners in communication, Moreno advanced an ontological definition of communication that includes the partners of this process. However, communication takes place within a given social subjectivity that is also configured in the interactional shared states beyond the consciousness of the partners in the process, something that Moreno did not consider because it was not part of the theoretical repertoire of the epoch.

Bakhtin and his disciples consider the psychological processes of the partners in dialogue as inseparable from the dialogue itself: “This world, where the acts take place is a unique and integral world, concretely felt (experiences): visible, audible, perceptible and thinkable, all of them penetrated by a volitional-emotional tone” (pp. 124–125; Bakhtin, cited in Leontiev 2001, p. 66). The dialogical act is part of this definition, in which Bakhtin stressed this individual blending of functions as penetrated by a volitional-emotional tone, what implies to recognise the subjective productions of the partners in dialogue. The subject of the dialogue is implicit in such a definition.

Social and individual subjectivities are configured recursively through the interactions of active subject’s in the functioning of groups and social institutions. The dialogue between individuals is only a moment within these subjective social dynamic systems that integrate social practices and relations; systems within which the individual is an author rather than a recipient in the dialogical processes. These dynamics represent particular configurations within the broader scenario of social subjectivity.

The social environment cannot be considered as a system of immediate and concrete social relations or influences; individual actions are subjectively configured within the social networks in which they take place, what defines the simultaneous social and individual configuration of any individual action. The effects of individual actions unfold in different ways in social and individual subjective configurations. There are not immediate relations of determination in this process of simultaneous individual and social subjective configurations.

Despite the overemphasis on discourse and dialogue that prevails in Bakhtin’s circle, in some of their positions it is possible to identify their considerations on the issue of subject of dialogue. Thus, for example, Voloshinov stated also in “Marxism and the philosophy of language”:

Language is not the function of the speaking subject, it is the product passively registered by an individual (...) Speech, the contrary, is an individual act of will and intelligence, in which it is important to stress: 1 – The combination by which the speaking subject uses language codes with the intention of expressing his/her own personal thinking; 2 – The psychophysical mechanism that permits the subject to exteriorize these combinations. (Voloshinov 2009, p. 99; my translation from Spanish)

The prior quotation explicitly emphasised the subject of the speech and the involvement of his/her thinking and psychophysical mechanisms in the speaking subject. Speech is a function that implies active subjects in their creative position during the dialogue. The continuous references to psychophysical mechanisms throughout the entire book, and the differentiation established by the author

between the ideological and the psychological are an expression of his very limited comprehension of both psyche and ideology.

Through their actions, decisions and imaginary constructions, individuals generate new paths in their transit within the normative social spaces within which human performances takes place, in a process in which the individual emerges as subject of its social relationships. Dialogue is only possible between subjects, between persons empowered by their capacity of assuming singular positions in the relations with others. The dialogue is a generative and creative process between subjects, whose positions within the process always transcend the current limits of the dialogue, generating its new qualitative moments. The dialogue is a social process subjectively configured within the recursive relation of social subjectivity and individual subjectivities.

As Shotter states:

In what follows below, I want to explore a radically better alternative: the idea, following, that what is special about all communicative exchanges is that they are dialogically-structured exchanges, and that they occur within the unceasing, intertwined flow of many unfolding strands of spontaneously responsive, living activity- an idea that occurs to us, not by reflecting on what is immediately occurring round us, but on what the larger circumstances of our exchanges must be like, for what we know what can happen within them, to be possible. (Shotter 2012, p. 134)

It is amazing that the living and generative character attributed by Shotter to dialogue is the same that characterises the dynamics of subjective configuration and senses through which the different expression of the subjects in dialogue are subjectively configured. These subjective configurations do not replace and do not determine the unexpected processes that emerge during the dialogue, but they are inseparable of the way in which the subjects in dialogue experience it. While the author emphasised one side of the dialogical process, this paper emphasises another, its subjective side that represents a living process within the dialogical dynamic. Our definition of subject also refers to a “dialogical subject”, but not to a subject that exhausts itself in the dialogue.

Not all the communication spaces are dialogically structured. The autocratic social spaces and institution never open space for dialogue and not all individuals become subjects of dialogue in social dynamics that are favourable to its expression. In any society, asymmetric social relations that are not dialogical at all tend to prevail. In living social life, individuals can or cannot become subjects of their relationships. Society, to a great extent, imposes a process of domestication that overrides the majorities that live without critical consciousness and follow in an unthoughtful way the normative systems of the different instances of social life. The subject emerges during its action and is capable of generating new paths of subjectivation during this process.

Dialogues and social relationships, dialogical or not, are the most complex processes of the social condition of individuals and social instances. The presence of the adult during early childhood is responsible for the relational networks within which affections emerge and socialisation takes place, setting the basis for the child’s development. The emergence of this early emotional “comfort” of the

children with the adults is essential to their development. Only Bozhovich gave attention to this fact in Soviet psychology. If Freudian psychoanalysis was very deterministic in its understanding of early childhood, establishing a close relationship between early sexuality and adult personality, the cultural-historical approach relegated the complex affective processes of early childhood in favour of the representation of adults as mere supporters of the different child's activities, as defended by Elkonin (1971). The others and the processes of socialisation represent the most important facts for the development of subjectivity.

The research of Bezerra (2014) evidenced how two children with learning difficulties, one of which was diagnosed with deficit of attention and hyperactivity, advanced in their intellectual acquisitions once a new space of socialisation was founded in the school with the support of the researcher. In her relation with them, the researcher structured a dialogical space within which new subjective senses configured another way to experience learning activities. In a year of work, the advances of both children in their school tasks were significant. The advancement of children with learning disabilities is impossible without creating a dialogical space as condition for the development of subjective processes that are inseparable of the performances demanded by the school.

This research, along the work of Goulart (2013), who researched institutionalised patients diagnosed with chronic mental disorder, and achieved results similar to those obtained by Bezerra, permits to come to the conclusion that the quality of communication as a dialogical process, and the creation of new spaces of socialisation within institutions regardless of their nature, are decisive processes for human development. Communication, socialisation and their subjective implications are three processes that advance together. Once affection emerges, regardless of its character, different symbolical processes emerge within the child, determining the production of subjective senses and the articulation of subjective configurations.

The topic of subjectivity not only has theoretical and methodological relevance for the development of the cultural-historical approach, but also it is quite relevant for advancing further on a definition of dialogical processes that were historically confined to an "internal mind".

9.5 Some Final Remarks

- Soviet psychology represented an important antecedent, in its different versions, to the development of the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint. In this paper, the contributions of different trends of Soviet psychology to the topic of subjectivity have been discussed within the cultural-historical theoretical perspective.
- The definition of culture stressed by Soviet psychology was narrow because of the absence of the topic of the symbolic in that psychology. The symbolic processes were reduced in Soviet psychology to language, speech and sign as mediator. However, the symbolic character of human realities and human

psychological processes and formations was ignored. Culture is always historically situated and thus represents a system in continuous movement that impedes the consideration of human reality as a static given, a concept that was quite subversive during the Soviet era.

- The recognition of the cultural, social and historical genesis of psychological processes implies understanding these processes as symbolic processes in their unity with emotions. Human emotions are capable of merging with symbols and dialogical symbolic processes within which new symbolic emotional units emerge. These symbolic emotional units, functions and formations are defined in this proposal as subjective senses and subjective configurations. Subjectivity, from this point of view, is not reduced to individuals but characterises all human phenomena and processes, which is why social and individual subjectivities are defined as recursively interrelated systems.
- Social subjectivity is not external to individual subjectivity; social and individual subjectivity are configured into one another during ongoing individual and social actions. In this process, simultaneous subjective senses are generated in social relations, an essential moment of social subjectivity, and in the individuals who interrelate within these social relations.
- Human communication is the most complex expression of the cultural and social existence of the human being. The subjective senses associated with the subjective configurations upon which human development is grounded always result from the process of communication. In this process, the presence of different others is a component of the paths chosen by each individual within the different social networks of their lives.
- Affection, communication and acceptance from others are essential for advancing in any field of human activity. Activity in its instrumental operational character is never the driving force of human development.

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