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The Path to Subjectivity

Advancing Alternative
Understandings of Vygotsky and
the Cultural Historical Legacy

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Vygotsky's brief intellectual trajectory in Soviet psychology was remarkably innovative—often contradictory. Indeed, over the past two decades, new interpretations of and counterpoints to Vygotsky's legacy have emerged that have led to reflections concerning his legacy and its consequences for psychology. (Yarochevsky, 1989, 1993; Leontiev, A.A, 1992, 2001; Zinchenko, 1997, 2009; Veresov, 1999; González Rey 1995, 2001, 2008, 2009). Even so, much of Western Vygotskian-inspired scholarship still understands the approaches of Vygotsky and Leontiev as integrated in that numerous scholars lump both authors under the theoretical umbrella of Cultural Historical Activity Approach (CHAT) (Zinchenko, 1997; Lektorsky, 1999; González Rey, 1983, 1999, 2008, 2009; Veresov, 1999). Such an amalgamation needs to be questioned carefully and pos-

sibly even reconsidered. Specifically, in this chapter I focus on the topic of subjectivity.

After a brief historical presentation of the basis for the development of subjectivity as result of social and cultural experience in Russian thinking and in Soviet and Russian psychologies, I present alternative interpretations by Soviet and Russian¹ authors to argue that the dialectical orientations of the post-1917 October Revolution were not incompatible with the theoretical constructions of thinkers labeled as idealistics, such as Troistki, Chelpanov and Schpet—all of whom underscored the relevance of culture for the development of the human psyche. I discuss Vygotsky's orientation towards cognitive-emotional synthesis or "unities," the generative character of emotions, and the idea of psyche as a dynamic system. These features, I argue, all marked a new ontological definition of the human psyche based on cognitive-emotional processes grounded in culture. Despite their cultural genesis, such processes and formations were, for Vygotsky, singular in their organization and in their cultural and social influences. Thus, Vygotsky's conceptualization of the social situation of development in the final stages of his oeuvre was, in my opinion, closest to Rubinstein's views. However, with the advent of Activity Theory, such unity was essentially considered, in its movement from activity to consciousness, as a reflection of reality rather than the production of realities by the child's consciousness (Zinchenko, 2002). I underscore that for Vygotsky external influences were made relevant to individuals as "perezhivanie," which appear as a result of the actual personal psychical organization. Perezhivanie thus represented the individual psychical production rather than the mere and exclusive effect of external influences.² That is to say, external facts are involved in a self-regulatory process of personality at the moment of one's living a concrete experience or series of experiences. Emotion is an expression of the personality's self-regulatory movement facing new experiences. Through the concepts of "perezhivanie" and social situation of development, Vygotsky introduced a theoretical representation of human development underscoring the self-regulatory movement of personality in the face of lived experiences from which appear "perezhivannies" leading to ruptures and, consequently, the beginnings of new development. After an examination of the evolution of these concepts and positions as the basis for the consideration of subjectivity from a new cultural-historical approach, I theorize ways of developing the topic of subjectivity from the concepts of subjective sense and subjective configurations. I argue for understanding human psychological processes as rooted in social, historical, and cultural genesis and development.

Materialistic and Idealistic Thinking in Soviet Psychology

With the emergence of the Soviet state, the conflict between idealism and materialism became ideological in nature. All idealistic thoughts or concepts were synonymous with the conservative and reactionary, and, by consequence, the old political order. Adherents to idealistic positions were potential or real enemies of the Revolution and the subsequent target of repression in academic and scientific institutions. Idealistic philosophers who played an important role in the consideration of culture as a source of subjectivity in Russian thought were effectively banished from the official versions of Soviet psychology history. To that end, Troitski (1882) who had argued that concepts themselves “configured the social cultural form of human thinking, appearing as a powerful organ of social relations” (p. 62) was officially abandoned. Troitski had been the principal professor of Philosophy at the University of Moscow and president of the Moscow Society of Psychologists when psychology was considered part of philosophy in Russia. The prestigious Soviet psychologist Budilova, devoted to the study of history of psychology, noted Troitski’s seminal contributions describing his doctoral thesis as: “The first Russian historical psychological work” (1983, p. 19).

The struggle between idealism and materialism mirrored the tensions between arguments for framing the origins of human thinking as cultural or physiological. For example, A. N. Leontiev and the Kharkov’s group criticized Vygotsky’s verbal reductionism in the comprehension of psychological functions. Even earlier, Soviet psychology was characterized by the confrontation between a mechanical interpretation of Marxism with an objective and concrete understanding of the genesis of the psyche versus the idea of the human psyche as a specific phenomenon grounded in the cultural character of human existence. Materialistic interpretations prevailed and informed the subsequent definition of an objective psychology

Two psychologists long stigmatized in Soviet psychology nevertheless, defended consciousness as a qualitatively singular phenomenon, distinct from the physiological processes: Chelpanov and his disciple Schpet. The relevance of Chelpanov and the first references to Schpet were raised in the early eighties (Budilova, 1983; Radzijovsky, 1982). Culture, consciousness, and subjectivity were re-introduced as important topics for Russian psychology in the beginning of the 21st century, even when the topic of subjectivity was explicitly brought into light at the 1980s (Abuljanova, 1980; Chudnovsky, 1988). The reluctance in considering subjectivity also affected the acceptance of cultural differences among the different ethnic groups that integrated the former Soviet Union. As Zinchenko (2007, 2009) argued, the influence of Schpet on Vygotsky seemed to be relevant in his interests for the development of a cultural psychology.

With the Fifth Congress of the Society of Soviet Psychologists (1977), a fault line emerged between the prevalence of a more official and restricted domain of an objective or “Marxist” psychology and the emergence of new approaches still “Marxist” but not restricted to an objective version of psychology—illustrated, for example, in the principles of Leontiev’s version of based object activity.

Subjectivity During the Soviet Period and Implications for Psychology

Although the topic of subjectivity was largely suppressed during the Soviet era, Vygotsky and Rubinstein nevertheless left clear, though distinct, notions about the active and generative character of individuals in regard to social influences. Rubinstein (1957) outlived Vygotsky by several decades and explicitly addressed subjectivity in *Social Being and Consciousness* where he argued that a particular quality of human psyche was its irreducibility in relation to external processes that participate in its genesis. That irreducible quality or qualities were a starting point for a truly dialectical comprehension of the relation between culture and the human psyche. In other words, although the human psyche had a cultural genesis, the human psyche was not reproduced in its nature by those external processes involved in its genesis. That said, Soviet psychologists, including Rubinstein and Vygotsky, consistently referred to subjective matters through other theoretical concepts such as gnoseological processes, consciousness, personality, psychological formations, and so on.

It is quite impossible to amalgamate Vygotsky’s thought into a coherent and unique narrative. Even so, Western psychologists have done exactly that—constraining Vygotsky’s theoretical position mainly to the period between 1928 and 1931. As such, Cultural Historical Theory is limited to Vygotskian notions of sign, semiotic mediation, internalization, and higher psychological functions. Indeed, Vygotsky’s focus during the 1928–1931 period, or cultural historical period, largely revolved around these notions. However, his earlier notion of a psychological system capable of integrating emotions and cognitive processes, ideas that reappeared in his last works, are today under-considered if not ignored in Western literature on Vygotsky.

As previously stated, Vygotsky’s orientation towards cognitive-emotional synthesis or “unities,” the generative character of emotions, and the idea of psyche as a dynamic system together marked an ontological definition of human psyche based on cognitive-emotional processes grounded in culture. When Vygotsky introduced the concept of social situation of development at the end of his work, he extended Rubinstein’s attempt at unifying consciousness and activity. However, in Activity Theory, such unity was essentially considered in its movement from

activity to consciousness, as a reflection of reality and not as the production of realities by the child's consciousness (Zinchenko, 2002). For Vygotsky, "The emotional experience [perezhivanie][1] arising from any situation or from any aspect of environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child" (1994, p. 338). Through concepts such as "perezhivanie" and the social situation of development, Vygotsky avoided the concept of reflection, which between 1928 and 1931 was embodied in his use of "vrachivaniya"—translated as internalization.

Vygotsky's use of the terms *personality* and *consciousness* in his earlier and later writings resembled Rubinstein's definition in that psychical systems were not to be reduced simply to activity. Renewed interest in the topic of consciousness in Russian psychology has since revived discussions of the ontological specificity of human psychical phenomena. V. P. Zinchenko (2009), a contemporary advocate of this new approach to consciousness, explained:

The task of any science that lays claim to studying consciousness is to fill it with concrete ontological substance and meaning. After all, consciousness is not only born in existence and not only reflects and therefore embodies it—to be sure, in a reflected or distorted light—but also creates it. (p. 46)

Zinchenko's oriented consciousness as an active and generative subjective system not controlled by external influences or contingencies. The continued search for an ontological definition of subjectivity was therefore important since subjectivity could only be recognized through its heuristic value in identifying new problems, in particular those related to motivation of the systemic functioning of human psyche.

Emphases on behavior, relations, and the social and discursive origins of human consciousness resist the subject's ability to create and produce his or her own alternatives through lived social experiences. The subject is not an exclusively external production. Rather, what counts is the configuration of organized experiences interwoven within the subject's system of subjective configurations—capable of generating new networks of subjective senses and possibilities for the subject's actions. In short, the re-prioritization of the subject challenged the extended idea that subjectivity and the subject are mere epiphenomena of discursive, semiotic, and linguistic practices.

Over time, Soviet psychology split into two different camps. The first camp oriented to an objective definition of psychology which chronologically focused on three different concepts, "Reflexological," whereby the psyche was explained on the basis of physiological processes; "Behavioral," whereby behavior was the objective focus for the explanation of consciousness and associated the concept of internalization; and based object activity that focused on the object and on the external in detriment of the concepts of subject and, consequently, subjec-

tivity. The second camp represented a minority opinion with respect to the latter position and became salient in the study of personality and motivation in ways that separate both concepts from the immediate determinism of external facts, dominant in Soviet psychology due to the principle of reflection. They attempted to overcome the determinism that resulted from the hegemony of the concept of object based activity.

Rubinstein, L. I. Bozhovich, V. I. Miasichev, and some of Rubinstein's followers such as Abuljanova, Antsiferova, and Aseiev dealt explicitly with issues of personality. With Leontiev's activity theory, motivation and personality were understood through the lens of activity. Only in the 1970s did the issue of personality become an object of empirical inquiry within the frame of Activity Theory as evidenced in Leontiev's book *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*.

If motivation and personality gradually became of consequence in Soviet psychology, this was due to the gradual realization of the limitations of Activity Theory in its treatment of subjective processes and phenomena. Eventually, L. I. Bozhovich (1978) one of the members of Kharkov's group, and Vygotsky's disciple, broke with Leontiev and the Jharkov group. She explained,

In the beginning we shared the same position related to needs and motives sustained by Leontiev. However, based on our first research we came to a different practical definition of motive because it was impossible to use "motive" while always taking into account certain objective things...In trying to analyze which needs "crystallized" in one or another "motive," what is behind the child's inclination toward one object or another, we found a complex knot of needs, desires and intentions where it was difficult to understand which was the object of an activity and which the motive. (pp. 19–20)

In contrast to Leontiev who had framed motive as the object of activity, Bozhovich drew from Vygotsky to examine the complex psychical organization of motives. Likewise, Davydov critically analyzed A. N. Leontiev's conceptualization of internal activity as identical to external activity whereby the object was framed as a motive. Or, as Davydov (1981) explained in a joint paper with his disciple Radzijovsky,

They (Kharkov group) took another decision (in relation to Vygotsky concerning the internalization of external activity). They conducted the "psychologization" of the methodological activity approach through the essentially new idea of individual activity as a trace of external activity. This idea was the basis of A. N. Leontiev and collaborators' cycle of works from 1930 to 1970. (p. 76)

Bozhovich's orientation to the study of personality via development represented a break from more traditional clinical approaches of understanding personality. Bozhovich's contribution was the specification of personality as an essential topic for general psychology—much as it had been for Vygotsky.

Chudnovsky (2009) in his recent biography of Bozhovich notes:

In 1939, she defended her candidate of sciences dissertation.³ A significant conclusion reached in her dissertation research was that schoolchildren's assimilation of knowledge is significantly conditioned by their personality relationships to the material. This conclusion would go on to become a core focus of her scholarship. (p. 4)

Bozhovich consequently developed a line in Soviet psychology—resurrecting Vygotskian concepts suppressed by Leontiev's dominant interpretation. The creative subjective approach to learning, in contraposition to the objective-based object approach centered on assimilation, became a central topic to Soviet and Russian psychology some years later (Yakimanskaya, 1989; Bruschlinsky, 1996; Davydov, 1999, 2002).

In my opinion, motivation and personality are central for the development of the topic of subjectivity from a theoretical account of the creative subject. I define subjectivity as those processes of subjective sense⁴ in their multiple and constant configurations in different human activeness. Subjectivity is always involved in subject action, as a subjective configuration that organizes itself based on ongoing action. Motivation is more than a simple psychical function. Rather, as a central core of subjectivity, motives must be analyzed as particular moments of the subject's subjective configurations in his or her multiple and simultaneous expressions. From this perspective and within a cultural-historical approach, motivation is central to the ontological distinction of the subject and subjectivity.

Traditionally, motive has been taken as a given content driving human action and almost always has been considered as embodied in a concrete content, e.g., the motive to study, the motive to play a sport. Via the motive, the concept crystallizes as a concrete entity. A subjective configuration frames motive as a network of different subjective senses, emanating from a continuum of an individual's lived experiences converging at the moment of the subject's action. The "motive" to learn or to achieve is configured in the child as the result of multiple subjective senses. We could imagine, for example, a specific case where different subjective productions of the child, such as the shame the child experienced about his or her social status, or the fear of his or her father who physically abuses his or her mother are combined in a complex subjective network that will mediate emotionally and symbolically the child's perception about the way the teacher establishes or doesn't establish relations with him or her. These intricate affections and symbolical expressions are organized as a subjective configuration that characterize those chains of subjective senses and, consequently, shape the child's behaviors in a classroom or school. Thus, isolated content cannot be defined as motive. Motive is always a configuration of subjective senses permanently produced on the course of human activity.

Also important in developing an understanding of subjectivity within a cultural historical framework is the notion of communication—first introduced as a specific psychical concept in Soviet psychology in the 1970s as a means of counteracting explanations that limited all psychological concepts in terms of object based activity (Lomov, 1978, 1984; Abuljanova, 1973, 1980). Communication as presented by Lomov (1984) integrated both the subject of the process of communication and its subjective character. Thus, following Lomov, “Communication appears as an autonomous and specific form of subject’s activeness. Its result is not the transformation of the object (material or ideal), but the relations with other persons” (p. 248). Lomov’s questions were later advanced by Davydov (2002) and Smirnov (1993)—both adherents of Activity Theory. Rejecting communication as an activity, Smirnov (1993) argued:

According to the main conceptual apparatus of the theory of activity, those processes that appear between two persons looking to their eyes to one another are not evident without making any external or internal act. There are bases to state that these processes of communication have completely different bases than those on which rest the concept of activity. (p. 99)

Reductive attempts to reduce psychological process exclusively to activity impoverished Soviet psychology to the extent that all psychological processes and phenomena were conceptualized as objective operations crystallized in the organization of activity. The polemical character of Soviet psychology in the late 1970s and the 1980s was indicative of a rupture with the previous Soviet agenda for defining psychology—a break that gave way to revised interpretations of the history of Soviet and Russian psychologies and the rehabilitation of figures previously stigmatized such as Schpet, Chelpanov, Bakhtin, and others (Budilova, 1983; Radziovsky, 1985; Yarochevsky, 1993; Abuljanova & Bruschlinsky, 1989; Zinchenko, 2007, 2009; A. A. Leontiev, 1992, 2001).

Subjectivity Revisited

New alliances such as the one between Davydov and Bruschlinsky emerged—theoretical partnerships that produced multiple positions and alternatives. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on those relevant to the development of the topics of subjectivity and subject from a cultural-historical standpoint. In 1988, subjectivity appeared explicitly in V. E. Chudnovsky’s “Problem of Subjectivity in the Light of Current Tasks of the Psychology of Education” in *Voprosy Psichologii*. Arguing that subjectivity could not be reduced to the assimilation of external influences, Chudnovsky (1988) underscored the active character of subjectivity through which individuals’ produce their distinct “realities”:

The fact that the genesis of subjectivity results from communication and joint activity is true. But it is not all the truth. As it was stated before, subjectivity has its active side, it not only is engendered by the facts, it influences them and it is this dialectic that is the key to understanding subjectivity. (p. 17)

Or, as I have argued, the “generative capacity of psyche” (González Rey, 2009) is crucial for understanding the subjective nature of culture—two moments of the same recursive system. Within this system, cultural events gain continuously subjective expressions in persons and institutions, and subjective processes become cultural accounts that are perceived as objective for persons, as a subjective effect that could be named as the naturalization of a given fact. Moscovici (2000) emphasized this subjective character of socially produced phenomena in his explanation about the objectification of social representations. Subjectivity, in this cultural-historical definition, cannot be considered only as an individual phenomenon because it involves the subjective sense productions and configurations that characterize the different social spaces within which human experience takes place. Each family has its own social subjectivity that is not the sum of the individual psychologies of its members. Differently from the systemic paradigm in psychotherapy, the concept of social subjectivity permits understandings of how subjective senses result from other social spaces and social discourses that assemble into the familiar subjective configuration. Each social space is configured on a subjective configuration that is revealed by its belonging to a more complex social subjectivity.

The entrance of the topics of subject and subjectivity in Soviet psychology (see, e.g., Rubinstein, 1957; Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Lomov, 1978, 1984; Chudnovsky, 1988, 2007; Bruschlinsky, 1996, 2002) and the growing force of such topics in those years also influenced two psychologists who were part of the Activity Theory group: Davydov and Zinchenko. Davydov first revisited and remodeled the topic of activity on a completely new basis. Zinchenko focused on the topic of consciousness in its more subjective definition—as Vygotsky had in the final moments of his unfinished oeuvre (Vygotsky, 1987, 1994).

Like Chudnovsky, Zinchenko (2002) defended the generative character of the human psyche centered on consciousness:

Once it appeared, consciousness emancipates from activity and it begins to create new forms of activities, to create the world and not only to reflect it, subordinating to it... Empirical justified an asymmetrical relation between consciousness and activity, not its unity. A slave work not always leads to a slave consciousness. Precisely the contradiction between consciousness and activity acts as driving force of human development. (p. 79)

Central to his definition of consciousness was its emancipation from activity and its capacity to create new realities and the basis of a psychology oriented to human

creation rather than assimilation. Similarly, Davydov maintained that activity was an interdisciplinary concept and not a purely psychological one—ideas that Lomov (1978, 1984) had suggested more than a decade earlier. Attempting to rework activity as a psychological concept, Davydov introduced desire³ as part of activity structure. In so doing, Davydov advanced the subjective aspects or “subjectivization” of activity.

Davydov (2002) explicitly referred to two important ruptures with the Activity Theory of his day. The first was associated with the Russian philosopher Bibler and the second with Bruschlinsky’s definition of the subject of activity. Davydov identified three weak points in the more classical definition of activity in Leontiev’s works. First, Davydov argued that activity could not exist as a psychological concept without the integration of desire as a central element of its structure. Along those same lines, Davydov introduced the concept of the subject of activity—with a nod to Bruschlinsky’s contribution. Finally, Davydov argued the idea of collective and interpersonal activity. Davydov’s extended arguments drew from Lomov, Zinchenko, and Bruschlinsky—who besides Zinchenko had never before been recognized by adherents of activity theory.

Integrating the idea of the subject of activity and desire as central for the psychological relevance of activity, Davydov (2002) overcame Leontiev’s objective definition of the structure of activity centered on individual acts and operations with objects. While his death prevented him from developing further his revision of activity theory, Davydov nevertheless began the work of revising the representation of activity given by Leontiev. Unlike A. N. Leontiev who only took into account individual activity, Davydov extended the concept to social relations and contexts.

Many of the ideas discussed in this section have been overlooked by Russian and Western psychologies. As this chapter is an attempt to defend the possibility of understanding the topic of subjectivity on a new basis, it is important for the reader to know not only Vygotsky’s contributions but also to know different positions and discussions within Russian and Soviet psychologies. This approach allows us to demystify the so-called “troika” as a monolithical position organized as result of the integration between Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev.

Vygotsky’s Legacy in Soviet and Russian Psychologies After the 1980s: Different Approaches to the Topic of Sense

The critical interpretations of the Vygotskian legacy that emerged in the 1990s (A. A. Leontiev, 1992, 2001; Zinchenko, 1997; Yarochevsky, 1989, 1993; Van der

Veer & Valsiner, 1994; Veresov, 1999) have impacted a relatively small population of researchers—with dominant interpretations of Vygotsky still remaining resistant to extensions of that legacy or to innovations by others. With the exception of Yarochevsky (2007), few have pursued the relevance Vygotsky assigned in his early writings to the generative character of emotions and the subjective processes. I (González Rey, 2009) consider the psychology of art and Vygotsky's first works on defectology as his initial foray into questions closely related to subjectivity within an evolving cultural-historical framework.

Attention to “sense” and the social situation of development has been largely excluded from current Vygotskian-inspired thinking. That said, the topic of sense did gain some currency inside Soviet and Russian psychologies at the end of the 1970s. In particular, these two issues appealed to some of the younger generation of Activity Theory (Asmolov, Bratus, Stolin, D. Leontiev)—energized by A. N. Leontiev's redefinition of sense in “Activity Consciousness and Personality,” which, as the title suggests, attributed more importance to personality than had been the case previously. However, the ways Leontiev's followers have historically treated sense suggest a number of contradictions. Alternatively, as A. A. Leontiev (1992) explained:

There are many theoretical ideas in these works, however, that were not picked up by the Kharkov group or were only partially accepted (he referred to Vygotsky's ideas after 1930). These were hardly noticed by Vygotsky's historiographers and were deliberately ignored by his critics. The most important of these ideas was that of “sense”, or “sense field. (p. 41)

By contrast, D. Leontiev (1994) argued:

This concept (the author referred to sense) first appeared in L. S. Vygotsky's late writings (e.g., Vygotsky, 1934/1987). He used this concept in his analysis of the complex psychological relationships between thinking, inner and outer speech, and intended to reveal the “sense structure of consciousness, considering sense to be “a relation to the outer word” (Vygotsky, 1982, p. 165). However, it was merely a declaration on the part of Vygotsky, who failed to go beyond the sphere of consciousness in his interpretation and use of the concept of sense. (p. 9)

D. Leontiev, a critic of Vygotsky's use of the concept of sense, attributed to A. N. Leontiev, his grandfather, the merit of having approached the psychological character of sense. If the concept of sense was really so central to A. N. Leontiev as D. Leontiev's interpretation argued, it could have avoided the critiques of determinism, individualism, objectivism, and universalism addressed to Activity Theory from important Russian psychologists from different fields since the 1970s (Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Lomov, 1978, 1984; Bozhovich, 1978; Bruschlinsky, 1977; Pushkin, 1977; Nepomnichaya, 1977; Zinchenko, 1997).

D. Leontiev's position is unsustainable because of the precarious presence of sense in the main works of more orthodox Activity Theory. A. A. Leontiev (1992) argued:

Only many years later did A. N. Leontiev (in relation to the Vygotsky's use of the term) speak publicly of "personal sense" (most clearly in his 1974 work, "The Psychological Problem of the Consciousness of Learning"). There appears to be a gap between Leontiev's "personal sense" and Vygotsky's "sense field", but it is in fact not the case. (p. 41)

I identify two distinct interpretations of sense. The first reduced the category to a concrete based object activity. The second, as emphasized by A. A. Leontiev and with which I generally concur (González Rey, 2009), considered sense as a new psychical unity critical to a new systemic comprehension of the human mind. D. Leontiev's genealogy of the issue of sense in Soviet psychology took A. N. Leontiev's definition of personal sense as a starting point—a descriptive concept aligned with based object activity whereby in the relationship between the goal and motive of activity, motive was framed as the object of activity. Alternatively, as D. Leontiev (1994) explained: "Sense in our understanding is always sense of something or of someone—sense of certain influences, facts, phenomena objective reality for the concrete subject who lives in that reality" (p. 278; taken from D. Leontiev, 2007, p. 83).

D. Leontiev (2007) explained, "Personal sense from the beginning in... Leontiev's representation meant the link between consciousness and activity" (p. 90). Thus, personal sense in Leontiev's work is understood within activity—as a reflection of phenomena from an objective reality. For Vygotsky, sense had a completely different meaning (González Rey, 2009, 2010). D. Leontiev (2007) further argued:

It could be possible to take [perezhivanie] as an initial psychological fact and therefore to recognize that it determines in some extent the way in which a given situation or, a given object of reality influences the subject. We answer no.... [Perezhivanie] effectively takes part of each subject's act within human activity, but [perezhivanie] is not the activity, neither its cause. Rather than the cause of activity, it is the consequence of it. (p. 81)

Unlike Vygotsky, D. Leontiev subordinated the subject to the moment of any concrete activity. Thus, for example, for D. Leontiev, the emotional reaction from one young boy to his result in mathematics will result in the way he involves himself in the activity oriented to learning mathematics, being the "perezhivanie" that emotional reaction to the performance in the activity of learning. D. Leontiev (2007) subordinated the subject to the moment of any concrete activity, as is clear in the following statement:

It is possible, in a first approach to sense, to define it as the relationship between subject and object or phenomenon of reality, which is defined by the place of the object (phenomenon) in the life of the subject. In this process the object become a representation of the world embodied in the structures of personality that regulates behavior in relation to that object. (p. 114)

For D. Leontiev, sense was an external given entity at the moment of individual performance in a concrete activity. The object was embodied in personality as a representation of the world, as a reflection of a given object. Sense was reduced in that definition, to the internalization of the object, which in terms of image or representation becomes an element of personality. Nothing new is produced from the current subject's psychological organization at the moment of living a given experience with the object. The objectivistic and mechanical ground of this representation is evident.

By the mid-1970s, A. N. Leontiev's concept of the "formations of sense" and his re-orientation of Activity Theory to issues of personality had gained new currency. Nevertheless, Leontiev's orthodoxy concerning reflection, a principle that historically ruled Activity Theory, resulted in consciousness and personality being explained again in terms of activity and reflection. Asmolov (1984) explained:

Therefore, a cardinal difference of dynamic systems of sense from those systems that exist in the consciousness surface formations, like subjective [pereshivanie] (desires, wishes, etc) is given by the fact that change of the personal senses and formations of sense always are mediated by activity changes, which takes place as the subject's objective relationship with the world. (p. 65)

For Asmolov, personal sense and formations of sense were the results of changes in concrete activities. Thus, these attempts to revise Activity Theory appear to have been thwarted by a ubiquitous objective psychology.

Authors such as D. Leontiev and Asmolov did not see a new alternative in Vygotsky's definition of sense. They attempted to constrain it to the limits of the logic centers of the object that prevailed throughout A. N. Leontiev's trajectory. Zaporochets and A. A. Leontiev's historic attempts to integrate A. N. Leontiev's legacy with the last period of Vygotsky's work took a radically different path from that of D. Leontiev in his attempt to emphasize Leontiev's and Vygotsky's differences concerning sense.

Advancing Vygotsky's Legacy Toward a New Conception of Subjectivity Within a Cultural Historical Approach

In the last thirty years, concerns about the reification of relational and social practices have brought the issue of subjectivity front and center (Guattari 1992; Elliott, 1992; González Rey 2002, 2005, 2007; Blackman, 2008; Clough & Halley,

2007). Vygotsky's brief elaboration concerning sense was remarkable as were the contributions of Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Schpet on this topic. Vygotsky (1987) interpreted sense as a process of consciousness, as an "entirety of all psychological facts that emerge in our consciousness as a consequence of the word." Two of Vygotsky's points are notable. First: psychological facts are not intentionally created; they emerge. Second, his definition of psychological facts did not exclude emotion.

Vygotsky's cognitive-emotional concept of sense is one that needs to be re-defined in ways that recognize more fully the unity between symbolic processes and emotion—a continuous movement between the subject's actions, relations, and psychological states. Subjective senses qualify the subjective character of human activities—not through their content, structure, or object, but as a subject's subjective production grounded in subjective configurations as the psychological space of any human activity.⁶

Not guided by some sort of rationality, subjective sense is a motivational concept involving emotions—a truly subjective production of women and men grounded in subjective configurations and new experiences, which always involve unexpected emotions and symbolic productions. The confluence of a multiplicity of subjective senses and emotional states that together create relevance, subjective configurations have, nevertheless, a relatively stable character.

Subjective senses and subjective configurations characterize the uniqueness of human actions, relationships, or psychological states. Thus, every human function is a subjective function. As Zaporochets (1986) argued:

We have reason to believe that, in contrast to the intellectual control that regulates behavior in the relation to the objective meaning of the conditions of the problem to be solved; emotional control guarantees a correction of the action adequate to the subject's sense of what is being done with respect to the satisfaction of present need. Only this coordinated functioning of two systems, only, as Vygotsky expressed it, the 'unity of affect and intellect' can guarantee a full realization of any form of activity. (p. 283)

Once a psychological function involves emotions, those emotions are inseparable from the whole subject's subjective system. Any psychological function expresses itself as a subjective configuration, as a subjective production that embodies the emotional symbolical dynamic of the function *in media res*. As Zaporochets pointed out, the full realization of any activity only could be guaranteed on the basis of that "unity of affect and intellect" produced by a subject's sense. Even when Zaporochets did not go further on the psychological nature of motive, his position was congruent with my understanding of motive because the multiple subjective senses obtain a new qualitative expression through subjective configurations within which they join together as the basis of any subject's performance. More specifically, children can involve themselves in their play's performance more than

the cognitive element. Their tactics and actions embody emotions and symbolic processes, expectancies, images, anticipations that are not cognitive at all but truly subjective productions. They are the result of the subjective configurations of those processes that appear as the real motive of those performances.

Subjective sense and subjective configuration as defined here are inseparable from the subject and social subjectivity (González Rey, 1991, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009). With subject as the person who actively produces new subjective alternatives within a given social situation, entering in contradiction to standardized rituals, procedures, and values dominant in that specific situation, the subject is always singular and grounded in his or her own subjective configurations. The person as subject is always subversive in relation to the dominant current social status, which appears to the persons who live in those spaces as naturalized and objective. The alternatives to those naturalized patterns are always subjective alternatives that contain a new social status as a subjectively produced option.

In other words, the subject is capable of developing subjective alternatives to dominant norms in any type of human activity. Simultaneously, the subject's creativity emerges in not being subordinated to the given or expected, but rather by questioning, reframing, and generating alternatives.

The emergence of subject is an important signal of personal development in any social practice. Even so, the subject is in flux—changing as a result of his or her subjective production as a crucial moment of social practice. The teacher does not change his or her way of working through the passive accumulation of knowledge. Instead, those ideas associated with his or her emergence as a teacher develop in the process of teaching, not as cognitive operations, but as operations of subjective sense in which cognitive operations are a moment of the functioning subjective configuration. The emergence of the differentiating subjects among those who participate in a communicative event is one important expression of the dialogical character of that event. Dialogue is made of the shared spaces and tensions that arise between participants in dialogue.

The subject's decisions and options represent possible sources in the genesis of new subjective senses. In this subject's processes, subjective senses appear behind the conscious intention, having unpredictable effects on the ongoing course of action. During a mathematics exercise in a classroom, one child carries out multiple emotions and symbolic expressions that integrate into a subjective configuration of his or her different cognitive operations in front of that mathematics exercise. This complex configuration and the subjective senses that are interwoven in this process are rather a subjective production than a real event. Generally, these complex subjective dynamics are completely overlooked in our practices as a result of our ignorance about subjectivity due to our illusion of control and objectivity. Those psychological states are not only emotional; they are

symbolic-emotional processes configured as a recursive chain within which those processes interrelated to each other become a subjective configuration. The expression of that configuration will always involve in the options and decisions taken by persons in their ongoing daily life.

This definition of subjectivity involves the idea of the subject as an active person immersed in his or her performances, whose initiatives and ideas are inseparable from the ongoing process of subjectivization that characterizes any human performance. Without subjective involvement, human acts become merely repetitive processes. Even when most of the postmodern authors have chosen language, signs and discourse as the site on which the subject is organized, the categories of subjective sense and subjective configuration claim the central *place* of emotion with symbolic processes that are inseparable as the ground on which subject and subjectivity should be understood.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to begin a discussion about subjectivity within a cultural-historical approach. I have highlighted processes and phenomena that are involved in any human action, practice and organization, overcoming the common trend to define subjectivity as an individual or intra-psychical phenomenon—a tendency that has led to conceptualize subjectivity as a remnant of modernity. It was the emergence of culture as a key topic for philosophy and social sciences in general, one of the elements that permits us to address the topic of subjectivity as a new quality of human processes through which it is possible to discriminate psyche as grounded in culture. This distinction facilitates overcoming several dichotomies some of which I want to emphasize.

Social processes and their effects always appear in subjective terms, not as reflection but as a true subject's subjective production grounded on singular subjective configurations interwoven with social subjectivity at the moment of living current social experiences. Individuals are active and creative producers within social scenarios; they are not simply effects. Subjectivity is not a reflection. It is a production that cannot be deduced from the external circumstances within which human actions take place.

In Russia, philosophy and linguistics were important roots for the development of the topic of subjectivity in psychology. However, the irruption of Soviet power gradually imposed an objectivistic and deterministic version of Marxism, banishing the topic of subjectivity from the agenda of psychology. It was in this context that Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev found their place in the University of Moscow as part of Kornilov's group, a key figure in the development of a Marxist psychology.

In retrospect, after the period of reflexology and behaviorism in Soviet psychology, the hegemonic paradigm that ruled Soviet psychology was Activity Theory, whose center was the concept of object-based activity. Under the domain of Activity Theory, Vygotsky's works re-appeared as fragmented and incomplete. In what was an obscure and contradictory relationship between Vygotsky and Leontiev, the Vygotsky of the time period between 1928 and 1931 was officially taken as the mature Vygotsky, keeping in the dark the relevance of the first and last works of this author. Rubinstein, in contrast to the pioneers of Soviet psychology, studied philosophy in Germany and did not participate in that beginning of Soviet psychology. In spite of his differences with Vygotsky, both of them maintained a particular sensitivity in relation to dialectics. Both of them also emphasized the idea of human psyche as a system and the need of new concepts to be able to integrate cognitive and affective processes. In this regard, Rubinstein gave special attention to the topic of consciousness and personality. On the other hand, Vygotsky, even working on personality in his first works—like Rubinstein, centered in his last moment on concepts like sense, “perezhivanie” and the social situation of development.

Besides sharing a critical route in the development of subjectivity within a cultural-historical psychology, in this chapter I presented three main characteristics of the human psyche: its cultural historical origin, grounded in cultural and social human practice; its generative character, that is to say, its capacity to create processes that are not objectively justified but which should be recognized as an essential part of human reality; and the inseparable unity between symbolic and emotional processes, a unity configured on complex subjective systems at individual and social levels.

Subjectivity, from this perspective, is inseparable from the subject's action. Each expression by the subject (person), in any field, is subjectively configured. This configuration emerges in the course of the ongoing subject's experiences. Despite the fact that there are more stable subjective configurations, which may be organized in the human personality, the fact is that none of those configurations determines human behavior. They appear through multiple and different subjective senses in the continuum of human experience within which new subjective configurations continuously emerge.

ENDNOTES

- 1 I define the category “Soviet” as all the literature produced during the Soviet Era from 1917 to 1990.
- 2 Perezhivanie acquired meaning in Vygotsky's work that in my opinion is different than that given to this concept in dominant English translations in which perezhivanie is translated

as “emotional experience” (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). “Perezhivanie” emerged in Vygotsky’s work as a new unity for the analysis of development, which carries out the integration of cognitive and affective into a new qualitative system that characterizes human development. As Yarochevsky (1993) explained: “In ‘perezhivanie,’ the logic of ideas and logic of sentiments lawfully come together, leading to the change of ‘formations’ influenced by maturation. ‘Perezhivanie’ should be understood as a self-regulated psychological system of personality” (p. 268).

- 3 Candidates of sciences in the former Soviet period and today in Russia are the equivalent of Ph.D.s.
- 4 Unlike sense, subjective sense is configured as a network of emotional and symbolic processes that emerge from the collateral effects of living an ongoing human experience. These subjective senses flow as an interwoven movement of emotional and symbolic processes where the emergence of one of them evokes the other without becoming its cause.
- 5 The Russian word used by Davydov in his original was “nuzhda.” It was translated to the English (1999) as desire. Even so, I understood the employed original term as a “state of need.”
- 6 The difference between my concept of subjective configuration and that provided by Gestalt theory is that subjective configurations result from the integration into a new qualitative psychological organization of multiple subjective senses grounded on social cultural personal experience, including and inseparable emotional symbolical unity, which was not explicit in Gestalt psychology, an approach that is much more representational.