

Marxism, Subjectivity and Cultural Historical Psychology: Moving Forward on an Unfinished Legacy

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Abstract. *This paper discusses different moments and positions assumed by Soviet psychologists in their attempts to define a Marxist psychology. The paper also intends to bring into the light moments, concepts and contradictions that have remained overlooked in Soviet psychology for a long time, and from where it becomes possible to advance a new definition of subjectivity from a cultural-historical approach.*

Keywords: Marxism, objectivity, subjectivity, Soviet psychology, Cultural-Historical psychology

Introduction

This paper discusses the main paths taken by Soviet psychology in its search for becoming a Marxist psychology. Despite the various moments that characterized this search for a Marxist psychology, this effort was monopolized since the mid-1920s by the identification of Marxist psychology as a natural science, following the principles of positivism that ruled to a great extent the natural sciences in that epoch and remained evident in the works of some of the more well-known Soviet psychologists (Vygotsky, 2012; Leontiev, 1975). The complexity of assuming one philosophy as a universal theoretical support for a concrete science always represents a great challenge; dogmatism is almost always the main result of such an approach. Scientific theoretical constructions should instead advance through dispute between different theoretic-hypothetical paths in the ongoing movement of scientific production. There is no scientific theory that could be defined a priori as the right path based purely on a philosophical position, because there are many ways in which the principles of one philosophical approach could be taken up within a concrete science.

The Search for an Objective Approach in Soviet psychology

The influence of neurophysiology on Soviet psychology was not only due to its strong tradition of efforts to achieve an objective psychology since Russian

times, but also to the political recognition that Pavlov and Bekhterev received – deservedly – as leaders of that movement in the Soviet era, which translated into political power and institutional recognition during that time. Unlike Pavlov, Bekhterev devoted time to psychiatric practice, which enabled him to be closer to the psychological challenges presented in practice. Bekhterev's theoretical positions, despite its neurophysiologic reductionism, led to a systemic explanation within which social and individual levels were integrated in the explanation of human behavior.

In Moscow and Leningrad respectively, the influence of neurophysiology and reflexology on psychology had its counterpart in strong university departments of philosophy that were being ruled by an Idealistic approach. These departments were the first to educate psychologists, before the October Revolution, an effort that significantly contributed to the institutionalization of psychology in Russia. Troistki, one of the main representatives of that movement, and his follower, Grot, founded the Psychological Society of Moscow. Some years after this event, Grot founded the journal "Questions of Philosophy and Psychology" (1899) and became its first editor (Koltzova, Oleinik & Tugaeibaeva, 1997). Chelpanov, who shared the theoretical position of the previously mentioned authors, founded the Institute of Psychology of Moscow in 1912, which became the most important institution of psychology in Moscow.

That Idealistic approach attributed an active and generative character to human consciousness and also

emphasized the relevance of language as an important link between culture and consciousness (Budilova, 1983). Both topics, consciousness and culture, were to turn into relevant principles for Soviet psychologists some years later, particularly through Vygotsky's works. The fact that these topics had entered Soviet psychology as a result of the influence of Idealistic philosophers was completely omitted in the official history of the discipline.

Chelpanov, the founder of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow, invited his disciple, G. Shpet, to join him in the organization of the Institute. Shpet was Vygotsky's professor at the Shanyavsky People's University for two years, and exerted an important influence on Vygotsky's works. According to Zinchenko (2007, p. 212):

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

Without any doubt, consciousness, language and culture were topics that characterized Russian Idealistic approaches to psychology before the October Revolution. Nevertheless, the way in which Marxism was increasingly endorsed politically as the basis for Soviet psychology emphasized the objective world as the basis for the development of consciousness, a principle whose elaboration within Soviet psychology led to a representation of consciousness as an epiphenomenon of objective causes. These causes could be internal, such as neurophysiological processes; or external, such as practical activity with external objects, a focus which replaced neurophysiological processes as the cornerstone for the definition of an objective psychology since the end of the 1950s of the 20th century. This materialistic reductionism in the explanation of consciousness led to a non-dialectical dichotomy between the external and the internal, which propelled a psychology centered on behavior rather than a dialectical psychology. As history has amply demonstrated, dialectic as method and power are always antagonistic, because dialectic always implies the relativity of the present time, whereas power seeks to freeze the present as the explanation of the future.

As a result of the replacement of Chelpanov by Kornilov as the director of the Institute of Psychology

in Moscow, the "reactology" introduced by the latter became another strong pole in the dispute about defining psychology in terms of Marxist principles. Unlike reflexology, reactology was based on the study of behavior and reproduced a stimulus – reaction scheme as the main explanation for human behavior.

Since the 1920s two forces evolved which both claimed the right to be considered the best Marxist explanation for psychology: the reflexology developed under Bechterev's leadership in Leningrad and the reactology spearheaded by Kornilov in Moscow. Luria and Leontiev were among the young psychologists who surrounded Kornilov in Moscow. In 1925 Vygotsky joined this group as a staff member on the invitation by Kornilov. The prevalence of Kornilov's positions in that moment of Soviet psychology is clear in this comment by Luria (1928):

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

Three things should be remarked regarding this quotation: first, the fact that Luria did not mention Leontiev, who was a collaborator of the Institute before Vygotsky; second, the rapidity of Vygotsky's ascension; and third, the fact that after eleven years of Soviet power, Luria still referred to Russian psychology, instead of Soviet psychology.

Aside from the dominant objectivist orientation adopted by Soviet psychology, which extended from its beginnings to the mid-1970s, there existed different theoretical positions in Soviet human sciences at the same time, for example, Bakhtin and Voloshinov in linguistics and Krupskaya and Ushinsky in education. The following quote by Krupskaya remarks on the relevance of Freud's thought for Soviet education: "The question of the translation of some subconscious impulses of human behavior to consciousness is very important from a pedagogical point of view" (Krupskaya, 1932, as cited in Koltzova, Oleinik & Tugayeva, 1997, p. 62). Although Krupskaya had been Lenin's wife, the latter had already died in those years, and she did not have the sympathy of Stalin. Bakhtin and his group also could not count on Stalin's sympathy...

Kornilov's theoretical stimulus – reaction scheme had much in common with the behaviorism of that time. This reductionist position also characterized some of Vygotsky's main writings between 1928 and 1931, precisely at the moment when Luria's paper was published. The following statement by Vygotsky (1995) is a good example of this:

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

This statement belongs to moment in Vygotsky's work that I have defined as an "objectivistic turn" in his overall trajectory (González Rey, 2011). In that moment Vygotsky omitted some of the main topics he discussed during the initial stages of his work, such as emotion, fantasy, imagination and personality. His narrow definition of the social is evident in how it is identified here with the external. Communication is merely an instrumental device through which signs are exchanged during speech. Signs enter communication as external objects and are later internalized and become mediators of psychological functions. The sign is reduced to a mere behavioral device, rather than being a symbolic piece inscribed in the complex network of social, subjective and discursive processes.

In 1913, Rubinstein, another prominent figure of Soviet psychology, returned to Odessa from Germany, where he simultaneously concluded his graduate studies in philosophy and his doctoral degree in the specialty of psychology at the University of Marburg. Working mainly in philosophy, he did not participate as a protagonist in the discussions that occurred in psychology during the 1920s; but he did serve as a professor at the University of Odessa in 1920 in the chair of philosophy and psychology.

The conflicts between members of the department resulting from their different interpretations of Marxism forced Rubinstein to resign. As a result of this stumble, Rubinstein abandoned philosophy and

began to work in psychology (Abuljanova & Bruschlinsky, 1989). Rubinstein won notoriety in Soviet psychology in 1930 when was invited as the head of the chair of psychology at the Herten's Pedagogical Institute of Leningrad.

According to Abuljanova and Bruschlinsky (1989), Rubinstein, in his paper "The questions of psychology in Marx's works", "applied the main positions of Dialectical Materialism and Marx's definition of activity to psychology, formulating the essential methodological principle of the unity of consciousness and activity. He defined personality as the subject of this unity" (p. 9).

Rubinstein and his group thus became another important pole in Soviet psychology at the beginning of 1930s. A historical fact that had remained unnoticed until today was that Rubinstein invited Vygotsky to join the Institute, where Vygotsky taught until the end of his life. The prestige of Rubinstein rapidly increased and as a result he was invited as head of the Department of Psychology of the University of Moscow in 1942. In 1945, simultaneously with this responsibility, he founded the sector of psychology within the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences. Once in Moscow, Rubinstein invited some of his students in Leningrad to join him at University's Department of Psychology, such as Yarochevsky and Komm; and he also invited A.N. Leontiev and other followers from the Kharkov group, such as Galperin and Zaporochets (Bruschlinsky, 2001).

In 1943, Rubinstein was elected as Member Correspondent of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, the highest honor bestowed on scientists in the Soviet Union at the time.¹ Psychology was in expansion in Moscow despite the "purges" in Soviet scientific institutions brought about by the polemic about genetics started by Lysenko at that time (Sheehan, 1985). "Lysenkoism" was progressively extended to the rest of the Soviet sciences with its main purpose being the development of a genuine Marxist approach for all the sciences. In 1948 Lysenkoism was officially endorsed as Marxist genetics, leading to the repression of all geneticists who were opposed to this point of view. The new climate of "ideological cleansing" extended to psychology as well, turning

¹ Rubinstein was the first Soviet psychologist to be elected as Member Correspondent of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. After him only Kravkov in 1946 and Lomov in 1976 also achieved this status. The Academy of

Science was the center of academic politics and decision making in the Soviet Union, and its activities and orientations was always mediated by the interests of Soviet political circles.

Rubinstein into its main victim. Rubinstein was removed from all his academic and institutional duties.

Related to the above-mentioned events, in the beginning of 1950s a meeting between the Soviet's Union Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Medical Sciences was jointly held; known as Pavlov Session, it was part of the legacy of Lysenkoism. As result of the meeting a "new physiological turn" was officially imposed as the basis for a Marxist psychology. For the first time one concrete approach was endorsed as the official Marxist psychology, in much the same way as it occurred in genetics.

As a result of the Stalin's death in 1953, critical turmoil extended to all the spheres of Soviet society, reaching a peak with criticisms raised by Krushchev against Stalin during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party. Based on these criticisms, new priorities emerged and the conclusions of the Pavlov Session lost their political relevance. However, the dominant social subjectivity generated by Stalinism would continue to rule Soviet life until the end of totalitarian rule in that socialist state. In psychology, the idea of a Marxist psychology remained alive after Stalin's death. Concrete activity with objects filled the vacuum left by Pavlov's main concepts for the explication of an objective psychology. The concept of activity in Leontiev's understanding was defined as external, practical, concrete and objective; attributes that made it a good option for replacing neurophysiologic processes as the key for advancing a new approach to an objective psychology. This understanding of activity was clearly expressed by Davydov: "The genetically early and fundamental type of activity is external, sensuous, practical activity with objects, from which all types of internal mental activity of individual consciousness derive" (1981, p. 26).

Activity was taken as a system in itself with its own structure and objective laws: activity functioned independent of its subject, just as mind functioned as a processing system of information for the first representatives of American cognitive psychology of the 1960s. The more than casual parallel development of these theories is pointed out by Davydov (1981):

Some attempts in this direction have been made in Soviet psychology (for example in the Leontiev study of the development of sensitivity) and in the work of some representatives of cognitive psychology (for example, J. Gibson; A. Neisser; and others). Of course, Piaget has studied this principle systematically, exploring in depth the *objective* foundations of operative structures. (p. 24, emphasis added)

In fact, there were many similarities between Leontiev's main positions, those of Piaget and the American cognitive psychologists mentioned by Davydov. For all of them, mind appeared as an impersonal and de-psychologized system of operations. Leontiev's definition of activity created a gap between external operations with objects and consciousness, on the basis of which consciousness resulted from the internalization of external operations. Among the multiple weak points I see in Leontiev's definition of activity, the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to pause at two which clearly illustrate his *mechanistic objectivism*.

First, in his attempt to overcome any remnant of Idealism, Leontiev identified internal and external activity by its structure, as a result of which internal activity became an epiphenomenon of the external. As result of this identification, subjectivity was reduced to being the image of concrete objects: "In the processes generated by these relations, objects are posited as subjective images in the human brain, as consciousness" (Leontiev, 1975, p. 31). The identification of consciousness with the images of concrete, material objects keeps consciousness prisoner within a scheme of "activity-object" within which the subject and its subjectivity are definitively suppressed.

With the above definition Leontiev, paradoxically, is left with no theoretical resources for explaining needs that are specifically human from a cultural-historical standpoint. In discussing needs, he made the mistake of defining them as preceding activity; as being inherent to the organism. He understood needs as states of biological functioning. Needs will become motive for Leontiev only as a result of their encounter with "material objects": "...need is only a state of necessity of the organism that in itself is not capable of giving rise to any specific activity... Only as a result of its 'encounter' with the object corresponding to it is it able to become capable of directing and regulating activity" (Leontiev, 1975, p. 87).

The characteristics of the activity function previously mentioned highlight the contradictions resulting from this mechanistic, dogmatic position. Leontiev defined need as an intrinsic biological state in such a way that he did not leave space for explaining the *specific* character of psychological needs. Cultural needs, unlike biological ones, are not inherent to the functioning of human bodies. Only after the meeting of a need by its object does the need become a motive, in what like a magical solution rather than a psychological explanation. The need becomes the motive without any reference to a change in its structure. Be-

hind this position is a dichotomy between the biological, given by the need, and the social, represented by the object, from which a different qualitative process that could be ontologically recognized as psychological can't emerge.

The person's feelings, memories, reflections, positions and decisions have nothing to do with the definition of motive sustained by Leontiev. As Davydov pointed out: "Objects *themselves* guide the transformations of this activity in the process of the subject's practical contacts with them" (1981, p. 14, emphasis added). The person as subject of activity is completely replaced by the object and activity in itself becomes a mere link between needs and objects.

Activity theory, more so than any other approach in Soviet psychology, implied the exclusion of subjectivity, turning itself into a pinnacle moment in the effort of developing an objective psychology. After the 1970s a new era began in Soviet Psychology, as a result of which the role attributed by Leontiev to activity as the key concept for the definition of Marxist psychology was questioned by different authors (González Rey, 2012). This new moment brought to light concepts and topics developed initially by Vygotsky and Rubinstein that had remained overshadowed during the previous decades, to be joined with concepts discussed by other classic Soviet writers like Ananiev and Bozhovich, who had created the premises for the theoretical emergence of subjectivity in Soviet psychology. The concept of subjectivity was thus made explicit by a new generation of Soviet psychologists who were disciples of the previously mentioned figures (Abuljanova, 1973, 1980; Brushlinsky, 1994; Chudnovsky, 1988; Lomov, 1984).

Advancing on the Topic of Subjectivity from a Cultural-Historical Standpoint

Since the 1990s my work began to be oriented towards a definition of subjectivity from a cultural-historical position. At the beginning this attempt was greatly inspired by Vygotsky's definitions of sense and "perezhivanie" as well as by the interpretation of Vygotsky's legacy developed by Bozhovich to advance the study of personality and motivation. Being critical of the cognitive reductionism of Vygotsky's definition of "perezhivanie", Bozhovich advanced further the close relationship between the concepts of social situation of development and "perezhivanie", which she articulated with her own definition of "psychical formation". As a result of Bozhovich's work these concepts advanced a different definition of mo-

tive than that which was given by Leontiev as the object of activity (Bozhovich, 1968). With these concepts as base, Bozhovich and her era also overcame the central place given to the concept of "leading activity" as the cornerstone for explaining psychical development in Soviet psychology. The concept of "leading activity" is inseparable from Activity theory as a whole (Chudnovsky, 1976).

The concept of sense, in turn, was restored to relevance by A.A. Leontiev (1992) for discussing a new moment of Vygotsky's thought. However, both these concepts, sense and "perezhivanie", remained overlooked by Vygotsky's followers until very recently, the reason being that neither concepts fit in with the dominant interpretations of Vygotsky that prevailed in both Soviet and Eastern psychologies (Fakhrutdinova, 2010; González Rey, 2009, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2011).

The relevance of aforementioned concepts to the development of the topic of subjectivity results from the new representation of consciousness that they implied (González Rey, 2009, 2011, 2012). Based on these concepts, it is possible to understand consciousness as a self-generative system rather than as a mere reflection of external activities. This position, in turn, might lead to an overcoming of the explanation of the genesis of consciousness as a result of internalization.

When Vygotsky argued that: "a word's sense is the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as result of the word" (1987, p. 276), he emphasized that "meaning is only one of these zones of the sense that the word acquires in the context of the speech" (p. 276). This claim enables the advancement of a definition of consciousness on new ontological premises: consciousness is formed by processes that are essentially different from those that characterized external operations with objects. Sense opens the window for a definition of consciousness as simultaneously organized in human action and as a psychical organization (González Rey, 2012).

Vygotsky referred to sense as a psychological formation, not as an operation or a function. This is not a trivial detail, since behind each concept rests a different definition of mind. One is operational, as mind was defined by Piaget, by the first generation of the so-called cognitive revolution, by Leontiev, and by Vygotsky between 1928 and 1931. The other, which was never made explicit in Soviet psychology, may be formulated on the basis of concepts like sense, "perezhivanie", psychical formations and the unity between consciousness and activity, as these were treated by some Soviet psychologists like Vygotsky,

Rubinstein, Ananiev and Bozhovich. In the latter definition, consciousness might be represented as a self-generative system within which the different psychological functions are organized in terms of qualitative processes which define the qualitatively different nature of consciousness as such. In our work, the specific qualitative nature of the human mind is defined by those unities of symbolic processes and emotions defined as subjective senses and subjective configurations.

Since *Psychology of Art* Vygotsky was aware of the need to develop new concepts that are able to bring to light the relevance of the affective processes for the comprehension of the human psyche, an idea strongly emphasized by him throughout that text:

This way, all our fantastic and unreal “*perezhivanie*”, in essence occur on an emotional basis completely real. So, we see that feeling and fantasy do not represent two separate processes, but essentially one and the same process. We correctly observe fantasy as a central expression of an emotional reaction. (Vygotsky, 1965, p. 272).

Vygotsky here took an opposite route from the realism that prevailed in Soviet psychology at the time. Despite his youth, Vygotsky took a step further on a key question regarding the development of subjectivity in psychology: the recognition of fantasy as an emotional expression. Because fantasy is a complex symbolic production, its inseparability from emotions makes it a subjective production that is clearly distinguished from those psychical functions defined as psychical operations. Fantasies carry out the qualitative character that distinguishes any psychical process which is subjectively configured as a moment of the person’s personality expressed in action. That is why fantasy taken together with imagination is considered in my work as a quality of any psychical process or function once it appears as subjectively configured. Such assumption allows for the integration of emotion as essential for the definition of human psychical formations.

However, the brilliant Vygotsky’s intellectual insight regarding fantasy did not find subsequent development in his later work, despite the new ideas developed by him after 1931. In *Psychology of Art* Vygotsky reiteratively returned to the idea that emotional states are as real as any other concrete reality, an important idea for overcoming the rationalism and naive objectivism that characterized Soviet psychology.

These ideas of Vygotsky’s were not consolidated within a new theoretical representation of psychology. They were ideas in process that might be considered expressions of a transitional moment in Vygotsky’s thought. Indeed, Vygotsky never used his later definitions of sense and “*perezhivanie*” to advance further on other main issues treated by him. Both concepts remained relatively isolated in his later works.

Unlike sense, as Vygotsky coined the term, *subjective sense* is defined by the symbolic emotional nature of human experience (González Rey, 2002, 2005, 2008; Mitjans Martínez, 2000, 2005). It represents experience as it is subjectively lived. Subjectivity, from this cultural-historical standpoint, does not only represent a new concept, but a new ontological definition for understanding human experience – whether individual or social. If the psyche develops throughout the evolution of living creatures as the progressive capacity to answer to the signals of the natural world, subjectivity in turn implies the human capacity to produce differentiating subjective senses as human production within the cultural realities that characterize human existences.

This definition of subjectivity implies transforming the way in which psychological concepts have traditionally been developed. In regard to the need to think new concepts for psychology, the works of Danziger (1997) and Koch (1999) represent a valuable source. Starting from this definition of subjectivity, for instance, reference to cognitive processes loses its meaning because all human functions that effectively motivate human behavior are subjectively configured in such a way that cognition is inseparable from other subjective qualities, like fantasy and imagination, through which our concepts and representations turn into emotional living productions. Cognition should be reserved to define those automatic sequences of psychical acts that are not subjectively configured as operations embodied by the subject of the action (González Rey, 2011, 2012).

Our definition of subjective sense was also influenced by Bakhtin’s definition of sense: “It could be neither the first, nor the last sense; it always exists between sense, as the link of a sense chain... In historical life, this chain endlessly develops” (Bakhtin, 1997, p. 350). The emphasis in defining subjective sense as a process has also been influenced by Mitjans² position of viewing subjective senses as processes of action.

Considering sense as embedded in the process of language, as Vygotsky did, is particularly attractive

² Personal conversations.

for our attempt to develop new psychological concepts. Upon these we can advance in the knowledge of the complex dynamics of multiple symbolical–emotional configurations, as the main units for understanding social and individual subjectivity. The replacement of sense by the concept of subjective senses points to human action as a moment of the person's subjective configuration rather than as a partial psychical production driven by an external stimulus or a situation.

Subjective configurations represent a network of subjective senses in movement. These subjective senses represent only a moment within an endless flux – which characterize the ongoing subjective configuration of the action. Subjective senses never appear explicitly in behavior; thus, for example, sadness is not a subjective sense. The subjective sense can only be trapped in the fluid course of a person's expressions through which elements can be identified. Putting these elements together through interpretation, subjective senses can be hypothetically considered as embedded in subjective configurations of sadness.

Sadness, like any other subjective state, is subjectively configured to appear in the course of human action through many different subjective senses, the limits of which are given by the integration of one subjective sense into others as a result of the self-movement of its subjective configuration. These subjective expressions should be taken in its whole to advance on the intelligibility of its subjective configuration.

Subjectivity, in this definition, is not restricted only to the processes of a single person. Subjectivity is common to individuals and social scenarios, practices and processes generated in human life. Based on this principle, we are setting out the terms of social and individual subjectivity not by positing the one as being external to the other, but as two different levels of functioning that recursively are configured into each other in the subjective configurations than simultaneously emerge in individuals and in social scenarios.

The symbolic nature of socio-cultural existence is the basis on which human subjectivity emerges as an ontological definition that cannot be explained by anything external to the influence of ongoing subjective configuration. This generative character of subjectivity represents one of the ontological pillars of human culture. Social productions such as race, gender, and class are simultaneously configured as different subjective senses into different social and indi-

vidual subjective configurations. Those social symbolic and subjective productions influence human experience only in the condition of a subjective state. Individuals only become subjects of their action in the course of their own action, during which subjects' decisions and positions become new moments in the subjective configuration of the action.

Some Final Remarks

Marxism was intentionally assumed by Soviet psychology as its theoretical and methodological foundation in such a way that the Marxist character of psychology was recognized in its objective definition as science. The exclusion of Idealist philosophers and psychologists from that psychology led to a dogmatic one-sided approach that did not allow for the emergence of subjectivity. The attempt to present objective conditions as primary and determinant in regard to psychological functions, as materialistic Marxism did, completely excluded the dialectical approach to this complex matter.

Philosophies cannot be taken as doctrines in which human action should be inscribed. On the contrary, they represent living models of thinking that permit advancement on new “zones” of intelligibility over the studied questions. When philosophies become doctrines, they turn into dogmatic principles aimed at preserving the current status of knowledge as well as human realities. This was exactly what happened to Soviet psychology.

Finally, there is no concrete psychological approach that could be legitimized wholesale as Marxist. There are many approaches for which Marxism can be relevant through its different theoretical constructions. This process is sometimes accessible to knowledge only through retrospective interpretations, in which a particular theoretical influence is detected more by its consequences on a given theoretical function than by the intention of its founders.

Subjectivity as such cannot be defined as Marxist; but Marxism, as discussed in the present paper, can carry out a dialectical and complex understanding of human life that permit going behind the classical dichotomies which traditionally have characterized dominant psychological interpretations.

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