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Vygotsky's "The Psychology of Art": A foundational and still unexplored text

A "Psicologia da Arte" de Vigotski: seu texto fundacional e ainda inexplorado

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Abstract

In the last ten years, new trends in the interpretation of Vygotsky's work have been developed, many of which have transcended the traditional interpretations that have been hegemonic in Soviet and Western psychology since the 1980s. Nonetheless, Vygotsky's "The Psychology of Art" is among the most interesting books written by this Soviet psychologist and, paradoxically, has not received enough attention in the study of his legacy. In that book, Vygotsky developed a rich psychology, in dialogue with Philosophy, Sociology and Art. In this paper, some theoretical questions and concepts developed by Vygotsky are discussed, which were not included in the dominant interpretation of his work, neither in Soviet nor Western psychology. The discussion opened by Vygotsky throughout the book shows that philosophy, art, poetry, Sociology and Psychology are interrelated in such a way that they are a living theoretical representation whose epicenter was human motivation and the creative character of human performance.

Keywords: Art; Creativity; Imagination; Motivation; *Perezhivanie*.

Resumo

Nos últimos dez anos, têm sido desenvolvidos trabalhos sobre as novas tendências na interpretação da obra de Vygotsky, muitos dos quais transcenderam as interpretações tradicionais que foram hegemônicas na psicologia Soviética e ocidental desde a década de oitenta. Não obstante, a obra "A Psicologia da Arte", de Vygotsky, está entre os livros mais interessantes escritos pelo psicólogo soviético, e paradoxalmente, até o momento não recebeu suficiente atenção no estudo de seu legado. Nesse livro, Vygotsky constrói uma rica psicologia, estabelecendo diálogos com a Filosofia, a Sociologia e a Arte. Neste trabalho são discutidas algumas questões teóricas e conceitos desenvolvidos por Vygotsky que não foram incluídos na interpretação dominante de seu trabalho, nem na psicologia Soviética, nem na psicologia Ocidental. A discussão aberta por Vygotsky ao longo do livro mostra que a filosofia, a arte, a poesia, a Sociologia e a

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Psicologia, estão interrelacionadas, de tal forma que, são uma representação teórica de vive para que o epicentro foi a motivação humana e o criativo personagem do desempenho humano.

Palavras-chave: Arte; Criatividade; Imaginação; Motivação; Perejivanie.

Vygotsky may be the only author in the history of psychology whose work was broadly discussed worldwide before many of his writings were actually published in their original language. Such an unprecedented situation was possible due to a psychology that was developed in an environment of high pressure, censorship and distortions, which was the reason why, until very recent times, the history of Soviet psychology could not be used as a source for new constructions, analysis and reflections on Soviet psychology.

This paper aims to reveal some theoretical questions and concepts developed by Vygotsky that were not included in the dominant interpretation of his work, neither in Soviet nor Western psychology, where some of his last ideas and concepts have just recently begun to be discussed. However, it is important to stress that some of his later ideas first appeared in the book, "The Psychology of Art", in which Vygotsky opened what I called years ago as the "first moment of Vygotsky's work" (González Rey, 2011), whose main concepts and ideas were taken up again only at the end of his life, between 1932 and 1934.

It is amazing that Vygotsky focused on art at a time when psychology was largely dominated by an empirical way of doing science, within which art and culture were completely excluded. In "The Psychology of Art", the great merit of Vygotsky is that he was still not under institutional and ideological soviet pressures, or widely influenced by relevant and better-known theories such as Gestalt psychology that usefully and productively influenced the last moment of his work. It is true that the version of "The Psychology of Art" defended as doctoral thesis by Vygotsky in 1925 expressed the influences of Kornilov's work in some paragraphs, which were completely contradictory with the rest of the text.

More recently, different authors have drawn special attention to the last period of Vygotsky's

work (González Rey, 2011; Leontiev, 1992; Yasnitsky, 2009, 2012, 2015; Zavershneva, 2010, 2015). However, the link between this period and the ideas discussed by him in "The Psychology of Art" has remained beyond researchers' attention.

In this paper, it is intended to evidence how some of the seminal ideas advanced by Vygotsky in "The Psychology of Art" were taken up again by himself in 1932, when he continued the pathway which he had begun with in that book and which he focused on until 1934, the year of his death. The paper is organized as follows. Firstly, the main contributions of "The Psychology of Art" are discussed in depth. Secondly, I discuss why this book was only published forty years after its introduction as Vygotsky's doctoral thesis, as well as the impact that its preface, written by A.N. Leontiev, had in terms of lack of attention given to "The Psychology of Art" in Soviet psychology and consequently in Western psychology. Finally, Vygotsky's return to the topics of his original agenda between 1931 and 1934, is discussed, as well as the development of these topics towards the discussion of meaning, *perezhivanie* and the social situation of development, topics that open a new path for extending his legacy to topics that have been historically less developed within the cultural-historical standpoint, such as subjectivity, creativity and motivation.

The theoretical originality of "The Psychology of Art" in the context of Russian psychology of the time

In "The Psychology of Art", Vygotsky continuously referred to more diverse expressions of psychology and culture of that time. The discussion opened by Vygotsky throughout the book shows that philosophy, art, poetry, sociology and psychology are interrelated in such a way that they are a living theoretical representation whose epicenter was human motivation and the creative

character of human performance. Russian poets quoted by Vygotsky in this text did not appear again in psychology or artistic magazines in the Soviet Union for 50 years. Vygotsky's interest in the psychological functioning of the creative artist, which was a relevant precedent to approach the study of creativity in a different way, was made clear in the next statement:

By its nature, artistic *perezhivanie* remains incomprehensible and closed to the subject in its course and essence. We never know why we like or dislike a work of art. Everything we intend to explain their influence is later thought to be a complete rationalization of unconscious processes. The very essence of *perezhivanie* remains a mystery for us (Vygotsky, 1965, p.25; translated from the Russian version by the author).

Here, Vygotsky emphasizes that *perezhivanie* is not a simple "emotional experience", as is commonly assumed in English translations. *Perezhivanie* has a specific psychological nature, stressing emotions as intrinsic to the creative functions in a process that is not accessible to the human being through consciousness. Complex psychological networks and dynamics lie behind these tendencies and need to be further studied. From the very beginning, Vygotsky's work recognized the emotional undertones of human actions and performances that are beyond the conscious control of the subject.

Vygotsky advanced a theoretical representation of motivation supported by the concept of *perezhivanie* as an emotional state of the creator that qualified their performance beyond any conscious proposal. Vygotsky seemed to worry about the subject's motivational formations rather than about the psychological entities or functions. In this sense, he used the concept of *perezhivanie* to define a set of emotions inherent to human performance. *Perezhivanie* was used to define the intrinsic emotional character of creation in art, as well as to explain the perception of the artistic work. Art, from his perspective, was intrinsically associated with feeling, imagination and fantasy.

We can never say exactly why we like one or another art production; words can hardly ever express the essential and most important aspects of *perezhivanie* and, as Plato stated (in his dialogue *Ion*), poets know the way by which they create less than anyone else (Vygotsky, 1965, p.93; translated from the Russian version by the author).

With the concept of *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky established dialogues with German psychologists devoted to the relations between fantasy and emotions in artistic creation, and with Freud on the basis of mutual interests, which revealed his great curiosity for the emotional inner life of human beings and its unconscious character. However, Vygotsky gradually introduced his own opinions and concepts, like *perezhivanie*, through which he advanced new demands in his search for an understanding of creative motivation, as we will see below. Vygotsky's sympathy with Freud was clear in chapter 4 of "The Psychology of Art", in which Vygotsky established a critical dialogue with Freud. Though stressing his differences with Freud, Vygotsky was, at the same time, very impressed by Freud's audacious and creative ideas about the unconscious character of some psychological processes and the central place given to fantasy. However, unlike Freud, Vygotsky did not associate *perezhivanie*, the nature of which he defined as unconscious, with inner human universal forces and defined it as being closely related with action.

Vygotsky's and Luria's relations with psychoanalysis extended until the end of the 1920s (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). The attention drawn by Vygotsky to Freud in "The Psychology of Art" is another argument for the openness of Vygotsky's original thinking while he was writing the first version of the book. Vygotsky's orientation to psychology in "The Psychology of Art" was clearly addressed to the study of the affective side of the human being.

"The Psychology of Art" had historically been excluded, as an "immature" moment in Vygotsky's work. I believe this was a result of the type of psychology proposed by Vygotsky in this book, which represented the opposite of the

objectivist path, taken by official versions of Soviet psychology from those years until the mid-1970s (González Rey, 2014, 2017). In addition, another fact that contributed to the representation of “The Psychology of Art” as an immature work was Leontiev’s short paper written as the preface of the 1965 Russian edition of “The Psychology of Art”. This introduction can be interpreted as a theoretical critique of the book which, in this case, included political connotations.

The real importance of the concept of *perezhivanie* in “The Psychology of Art” has long passed unnoticed and many Vygotsky interpreters who are interested in the concept still do not consider the use to *perezhivanie* given by Vygotsky in this book. It was in “The Psychology of Art” that Vygotsky highlighted *perezhivanie* as the set of emotional processes that integrates the unit fantasy-emotion as inseparable from artistic creation.

The involvement of emotions in human creation was promising due to its potential for explaining a new qualitative level of the human psyche within which emotions are inseparable from intellectual operations. This position anticipated Vygotsky’s emphasis on the intellectual and emotional unity that characterized his holistic period, between 1932 and 1934 (Yasnitsky, 2015; Zavershneva, 2015). Concentrated heavily on artistic *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky could not extend its use to other types of human performance in which the individual is actively involved as the creative subject of the action. However, *perezhivanie* was a key concept in his emphasis on the emotional side of human life.

“The Psychology of Art” was not only an expression of the broad intellectual and cultural interests of Vygotsky in the first moment of his work, it was also an expression of Vygotsky’s special interest in the topics of emotions, fantasy and imagination, which formed one of the theoretical cores of “The Psychology of Art”. His dialogue with Freud and Ribot also evidenced his interest in the relation of those topics with mental disorders. So, in a dialogue with Ribot, Vygotsky stated:

This new approach can be described approximately as follows: The psychologists proceed from the irrefutable association that exists between emotion and imagination. We know that every emotion has a psychic expression in addition to a physical one. In other words, a feeling “is embodied, fixed in an idea, as is evidenced in cases of persecution mania”, according to Ribot. Consequently, an emotion is expressed by the mimic, pantomimic, secretory, and somatic responses of our organism. It also requires some expression of our imagination. We find the best evidence for this view among the so called objectless emotions. Pathological phobias, persistent fears, and so forth, are always associated with specific ideas, most of which are absolutely false and distort reality, but in so doing, find their “psychic” expression. A patient who suffers from obsessive fear is emotionally sick, his fear is irrational; and so in order to rationalize it, he imagines that everyone is pursuing and persecuting him (Vygotsky, 1971, p.209).

At that time, Vygotsky was closer to subjectivity than at any other moment of his work. The idea that “feeling is embodied, fixed in an idea”, as stressed by Vygotsky, was an important antecedent of the way he would approach the concept of unit in the last stage of his work, mainly expressed by concepts such as senses and *perezhivanie*. Nonetheless, in that last stage of his work, Vygotsky was still far from the position that any idea, once it becomes subjectively configured, distorts reality, creating imaginary realities, which is the cornerstone of our proposal of subjectivity. However, Vygotsky’s most important theoretical intuition is that, aside from the different corporal and somatic expressions of emotions, these processes always require the expression of imagination. Art was the path for Vygotsky to advance a new and original representation of the human mind. Following his previous idea, Vygotsky took an audacious step forward:

This means that in essence, all our fantasy experiences take place on a completely

real emotional basis. We see, therefore, that emotion and imagination are not two separate processes; on the contrary, they are the same process. We can regard a fantasy as the central expression of an emotional reaction (Vygotsky, 1971, p.210).

The consideration of fantasy “as the central expression of an emotional reaction” is essential because it integrates emotions with psychological functions. Such integration emphasizes the “fictional character” of psychological functions, the objectivity of which is inseparable from their cultural and emotional character. This is an argument which implies that objectivity should be considered as a culturally produced concept. Properly human processes and realities are fictional, not because they are non-objective, but because they are new realities invented by human beings, which progressively separate them more and more from nature. This human nature is inseparable from a plot of different facts and conditions that are not controlled by individuals or social instances; this fact defines all human processes and realities as objective. Nonetheless, human realities, processes and facts share a qualitative attribute that does not exist in the rest of natural phenomena; their subjective character turns human beings into creators, making them capable of creating new, original realities and processes within which, in turn, subjectivity emerges.

Taking the prior statements as starting points, it is possible to advance in the recognition that our “imaginary situations” are founded on a “completely real emotional basis”, which implies in recognizing fantasy experiences as a new kind of human phenomenon. Human realities and their objectivity are inseparable from human actions, and therefore, for human beings, objectivity is always subjectively produced in human relations. The relevance of this process is that the fictional reality of culture is part of the genesis and development of the human mind, and the human mind defines new moments in the production of culture, in an endless process within which neither culture nor human mind are objectified by one another, something that Vygotsky never made explicit in his work.

Vygotsky’s definition of culture was still very narrow, identifying culture mainly with language, without considering human institutions, and other human domains like science, politics and other socially given phenomena as cultural instances. The topic of the symbolic was very narrowly treated by Vygotsky, who mainly emphasized the sign among the many diverse symbols, symbolical devices and realities (Zinchenko, 1993).

In “The Psychology of Art” Vygotsky expressed his concern at the absence of a psychological theory capable of advancing the study of sentiments and fantasies, topics that for a long time had been monopolized by psychoanalysis:

It is necessary to say, however, that there are not any more obscure topics than these two (Vygotsky is referring to sentiments and fantasy) and although they have been subject to more development and examination in recent times, at least until today, unfortunately, we have no general recognized and elaborated system for the study of sentiments and fantasy (Vygotsky, 1965, p.256, translated from the Russian version by the author).

Vygotsky’s concern with the absence of theoretical systems capable of bringing light to topics such as sentiments and fantasy, clearly evidenced his interest in advancing a psychology capable of studying these phenomena. Focused on these topics, Vygotsky created the basis for advancing new ways in the study of motivation and creativity. On such a different psychological system, Vygotsky attempted to advance it in the last moment of his work through a new definition of consciousness (González Rey, 2009, 2011, 2017; Leontiev, 1992; Zavershneva, 2015).

“The Psychology of Art” also brought to light some methodological insights that dealt closely with its theoretical proposal.

For this reason, I think it is necessary to propose another method for the psychology of art, which needs a clear methodological basis. Against this proposal, I will frequently object to what is often said in relation to the

study of the unconscious: the unconscious is, according to its own meaning, something not recognized by us and therefore not clear for us, and for this reason, it could not become the object of scientific research. Starting from this erroneous premise that “we can study only (and in general can only know) what we directly recognize has no support because we study and know many things that we do not directly know and what we know only with the support of analogies, constructions, hypotheses, conclusions, deductions and so on, in general by indirect ways” (Vygotsky, 1965, pp.32-33; translated from the Russian version by the author).

Vygotsky acutely perceived that to further advance on the questions he raised in “The Psychology of Art”, it was important to use indirect routes, analogies and assumptions as methodological resources for following the complex processes of human creation. This relevant epistemological assumption has been completely unnoticed by Vygotsky’s followers within and outside Soviet psychology. In the Soviet Union, epistemological discussions in particular were taboo due to their philosophical implications for a science ruled by a strict objectivity based on the empirical correspondence between theory and empirical facts.

We stated in the first chapter that this point of view was wrong and that practice magnificently denies it. This shows that science studies not only immediate and recognized facts, but also a series of phenomena and events that can be studied only indirectly by means of footsteps and vestiges, and with the help of material that is not only completely different from what we study but which is often false (Vygotsky, 1965, p.94; translated from Russian version by the author).

These methodological assumptions advanced in the opposite direction to the positivist path taken by the instrumental and experimental positions that characterized first the researchers in

Kornilov’s group, and later the experimental studies of psychological functions that were conducted following the Activity Theory framework. These natural and objective methodological positions were also defended by Vygotsky between 1927 and 1931 (Vygotsky, 2012).

The Psychology of Art”: its first publication 40 years after its presentation as Vygotsky’s doctoral thesis

This first edition of “The Psychology of Art” was published in 1965 with a short “introductory paper” by A. N. Leontiev, a fact that, taken together with the omission of Soviet psychology regarding the topics discussed by Vygotsky in that book, contributes to explaining the lack of attention for this book in Soviet psychology. Vygotsky’s work was centered on art, but his reflections had relevant implications to the development of a general psychology, since the motivational and creative processes discussed by him in relation to art are general to all human motivated performances. In that introduction, Leontiev made a presentation/ wrote an introduction stressing the idea that the book represented a historical work with little theoretical value, considering the advances of Soviet psychology in the 40 years after the book had been written. That edition had little impact in the Soviet Union.

No matter how distant this prologue was written in relation to the original version of the book, to some extent it permits an explanation of why the book was published so late, as well as of the slight impact it had in Soviet psychology. Since 1951, Leontiev had been the Chair of Psychology in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Moscow. He enjoyed the peak of his intellectual and political prestige in 1963, when he received the “Lenin Prize”. Why then, instead of using the publication of “The Psychology of Art” as a first step to the introduction of Vygotsky in the West, did he write such a highly critical introductory paper to a book that was extremely difficult to access, given the small numbers of this edition?

Leontiev's preface to this edition of "The Psychology of Art" seemed to have a political proposal that announced the main trends of Soviet psychology in the 1960s. His introductory paper represented a written testimony of the integration of Vygotsky's ideas within the Activity Theory as it was developed by Leontiev, which represented the new dominant official psychology of the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

From the very beginning of his preface, Leontiev diminished the moment of Vygotsky's ideas with political argumentation:

Vygotsky wrote "The Psychology of Art" forty years ago in the years of the establishment of Soviet psychological science. At that time a battle was still being waged with the idealistic psychology that dominated the most important psychological research center of the country – the Institute of Psychology of the University of Moscow, headed by professor Chelpanov. ... At that time, Vygotsky was still a young man within scientific psychology, and it is also possible to say an unexpected man (Leontiev, 1965, p.iii-iv; translated from the Russian version by the author).

It is curious from a historical perspective that, even after Stalinism was officially overcome, the political discourse of Leontiev continued the same arguments developed by Soviet psychology in the 1930s, an expression of pressure and institutional political control at a time when social fear strongly characterized the social subjectivity of the country. The arguments given by Leontiev in 1965 are similar to those that supported the most conservative sector of Soviet psychology in the 1920s and 30s. Leontiev's ideological orthodoxy at that time was a clear evidence of his political position, which was impossible to separate from his theoretically conservative position in psychology. Leontiev invalidated Vygotsky and the best Russian poets and intellectuals of the time by stressing that socialist realism was not yet an option when "The Psychology of Art" was introduced. In 1965, Leontiev continued to defend socialist realism.

After all the criticism, as exemplified above, Leontiev emphatically invalidated Vygotsky as a serious author by drawing a completely different picture of psychology than the one defended by Vygotsky in "The Psychology of Art": "For this reason Vygotsky frequently speaks as an author but still not through his own words; he quotes many authors, even authors who are strange to him in their more general basis" (Leontiev, 1965, p.viii).

In conclusion, Leontiev stated that:

After forty years of claiming that Soviet psychologists had done much with Vygotsky and after him, many of the positions in this psychological book should be interpreted in another way – from the position of contemporary representations of activity and human consciousness. (Leontiev, 1965, p.x; translated from the Russian version by the author).

According to Leontiev, Vygotsky developed a few ideas of his own in the book. For this reason, Vygotsky's position needs to be updated in light of the advances in Soviet psychology made after his death, which were reduced by Leontiev to the works about consciousness and activity. The focus of Activity Theory at that time was activity itself, and consciousness was understood as the epiphenomenon of this focus (Zinchenko, 2002, 2009).

That "short introductory paper" was written two decades after the virulent attack made by Leontiev against the ideological deviation of Vygotsky in regards to pedology (Leontiev, 1937/1998), which remained unknown until 1998, when it was published in Russian in the journal "*Voprosy Psichologii*". This critique addressed by Leontiev to Vygotsky did not represent an isolated fact; the differences and reciprocal criticisms between them became increasingly more acute during Vygotsky's life, particularly after the decision by Vygotsky to advance a theory of consciousness in 1933 (Zavershneva, 2015). Leontiev's short introductory paper to "The Psychology of Art" and the various references to Vygotsky, as well as Vygotsky's quotations used by Leontiev after

his death, including the absence of references to Vygotsky in his last book "Activity, Consciousness and Personality", leads to the conclusion that Leontiev's main proposal regarding Vygotsky was to relegate him to the past, as a mere historical source of the Activity Theory, which represented the most mature theory of Soviet psychology since the 1960s.

Behavior and social determinism became central to the definition of an objective psychology, which Kornilov and his group considered as a Marxist psychology. Under the new political and scientific conditions in which Vygotsky worked since his entry to Kornilov's group in 1924, he took a completely different path from that of "The Psychology of Art". The central place given to behavior by Kornilov in those years was explicitly defended by Luria as follows: "The psychologist as a rule shares the objective position of physiologists, but carry on their work on a much broader basis, approaching psychology from the perspective of that structural behavior which is determined by social conditions" (Luria, 1928, p.347). It was Vygotsky's turn to the study of higher forms of human behaviors, used by him indistinctively as higher psychological functions that have as their main function the control of behavior, as will be discussed below, a clear expression of the winds that blew in Kornilov's group at that time.

The return of Vygotsky to some of his main topics in "The Psychology of Art"

In what is termed the third stage of Vygotsky's work, in the period between 1931 and 1934 (González Rey, 2011, 2016), he transcended some positions that dominated his works between 1927-1931, a period that has been defined by different authors as an instrumental period (Leontiev, 1984; Yasnitsky, 2015; Zavershneva, 2015). The concepts of higher psychological functions, sign, mediation and internalization, which were central in this instrumental period were replaced by concepts like *perezhivanie*, sense and social situation of development. It is amazing that these concepts were largely overlooked by both Soviet and Western psychology until very recent

times. In Soviet psychology only Bozhovich (1968) drew attention to the concepts of *perezhivanie* and social situation of development, advancing forward on Vygotsky's definition on *perezhivanie*.

However, the concept of sense may be a result of its very short and fast formulation by Vygotsky, and its little integration to the rest of the concepts has been considered as relevant by very few authors (González Rey, 2002, 2005, 2009; Leontiev, 1992; Zavershneva, 2015). The concept of word sense, as formulated by Vygotsky opened a new path to advance on consciousness as a psychological system. Sense, as defined by Vygotsky, is:

A word's sense is the aggregate of all psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word. Sense is a dynamic, fluid, and complex formation which has several zones that vary in their stability. Meaning is only one of these zones of the sense that the word acquires in the context of speech (Vygotsky, 1987, p.279).

As sense was defined by Vygotsky as a quality of the word, in fact the word itself is transformed into a psychological unit, embodying several psychological facts that arise in consciousness as a result of its emergence. His definition of sense, which was strongly influenced by the French psychologist Frédéric Paulhan, followed the principle of integration between emotions and ideas already discussed by him in "The Psychology of Art", when he still had not been in contact with Lewin and his group. The idea of unit was in embryo in "The Psychology of Art" when Vygotsky was at the very beginning of his work. The relations stressed by him in "The Psychology of Art", between emotions, imagination and fantasy, were topics that he completely abandoned during his instrumental period.

Undoubtedly, the influence of K. Lewin and his group on Vygotsky was strong in that last stage of his work (Bozhovich, 1968; Yarochevsky, 2007; Yasnitsky, 2012, 2015; Zavershneva, 2015). Lewin's advances on the inseparability of human needs and the social environment were closely associated with the inseparability of personality

and environment. Lewin's position on the matter helped to understand the environment, not as a reality *per se*, but in its close relation to individuals. Individuals were understood as inseparable from the environment and the concept of relationship became central for the understanding of the relationship between individuals and their social environment. For Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* appears to be the psychological term to explain that unit. The impossibility of analyzing social environment outside of individual motivation and personality influenced Vygotsky's definition of *perezhivanie* through which he attempted to overcome the mechanical social determinism as understood by Soviet psychology at that time.

The impossibility to split social environment from a child's personality was clearly expressed by Vygotsky as follows:

To state a certain, general, formal position, it would be correct to say that the environment determines the development of the child through *perezhivanie* of the environment. Most essential, therefore, is rejection of the absolute indicators of the environment; the child is part of the social situation, and the relationship between the child and the environment and between the environment and the child occurs through *perezhivanie* and the activity of the child himself (Vygotsky, 1998, p.294).

Perezhivanie is used by Vygotsky to understand the child's relations with the environment as the real force for their development. Nonetheless, the concept as such is vaguely defined in its psychological nature, leaving many theoretical gaps to be filled. (González Rey, 2015a, 2016b). Be that as it may, his focus seemed to be concentrated on the rejection of the absolute indicators of the environment, something that was extremely revolutionary in relation to the way social environment was understood by behavioral psychology and by Soviet psychology as well, that always had important convergences with a behavioral representation of psychology.

Vygotsky's turn toward the emotional side of human psyche, between 1931 and 1934, aside from

some promising statements about emotions and his advances on some important concepts such as sense and *perezhivanie*, in fact resulted in contradicting his emphasis on the cognitive genesis of *perezhivanie*. Bozhovich's critique of the concepts of *perezhivanie* in that last period of Vygotsky's work made that contradiction very explicit. Bozhovich expressed this failure by Vygotsky as follows:

If the concept of experience as raised by him (concept that expressed the child's affective relations to the environment) brings us closer to the interpretation of the true causes of child development, the subsequent search for the link that determines this development, a search that ends in the concept of generalization, has again made us return to intellectualist positions (Bozhovich, 1981, p.125; translated from the Spanish version by the author).

Bozhovich, without making it explicit and perhaps without being clearly conscious of this, in fact, got deeper into Vygotsky's positions in "The Psychology of Art". Her search for concepts through which to understand personality as a motivational system was closer to Vygotsky's attempt to integrate emotions, imagination and fantasy, which he stressed as the basis for the psychological genesis of art and mental disorders. This path was evident in Bozhovich's effort to find concepts that were impossible to reduce to cognitive genesis or functioning. That effort was clear in this next assumption by Bozhovich:

In other words, what underlies *perezhivanie*, as we see it, is the world of children's needs – their impulses, desires, intentions, complexly intertwined with one another and interrelated with possibilities for meeting these needs. And this entire complex system of connections, the entire world of a child's needs and impulses, must be deciphered so that we can understand the nature of the influence external circumstances exert on children's mental development (Bozhovich, 2009, p.70).

As result of the lack of a new ontological definition related to human psychological processes

in Soviet psychology, these processes continued to be vaguely defined by the concept of psyche, and Bozhovich defined *perezhivanie* as an affective formation². A new definition of motivation was in process in Bozhovich's work; motivation was understood rather as a system of formations that define the psychological core of personality, instead of being defined by specific concrete motives, as the concept of motivation has been historically understood by psychology. However, for this representation to advance forward, it would be necessary to transcend the taxonomy of concepts by which human motivation has historically been explained, such as needs, desires, among others.

The necessary step forward to be done demands a theoretical link capable to explain how emotions become symbolical processes having a cultural genesis; body and culture become inseparable through this possible connection. Nonetheless, that connection was impossible to be found in a psychology that treated the symbolic processes through a very narrow notion of individual mediation of psychological functions through signs as Vygotsky did. The narrow representation of the symbolical processes and realities was in some extent responsible for the narrow comprehension of culture and social processes in Soviet psychology (González Rey, 2016a, 2017; González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2016).

Bozhovich was aware of the need to explain motives as self-oriented systems, and not as drives defined by external objects, as defined by A.N. Leontiev.

Children may therefore strive to once again relate to something they experienced previously that became appealing to them. In this case, *perezhivanie* is transformed from being a means of orientation to a goal in and of itself and leads to the emergence of new needs – the need for *perezhivanii*

themselves. However, in this regard as well, *perezhivanii* are not the exception. In the process of development, the entire human mind ceases to be a mere apparatus of orientation and adaptation (Bozhovich, 2009, p.74-75)³.

In the paragraph above, Bozhovich pointed out an important question without which the problem of human motivation could not be advanced; human motivation is intrinsic to a concept of mind and understood as a generative and creative system. The prior statement is not a simple call to advance a new concept of motivation, but an idea to advance a new concept of human mind; Bozhovich regarded the human mind as a creative system, capable of producing new realities. Bozhovich was the only Soviet author to embody the main ideas that were interrupted in "The Psychology of Art".

Aside from my personal vindication in previous studies that Vygotsky, in the final years of his life returned to his origins, defined by me as a qualitative moment, not as chronological one, because "Pedagogical Psychology" was very close chronologically, but very different from a theoretical perspective. In fact today I don't agree with my own vindication. Vygotsky, at the last moment of his work, despite his strong theoretical advances discussed above, fails in assembling these concepts within a theoretical system. Because of this, these concepts overlapped each other, and were not used in theoretical constructions in which they could have been pertinent at that time. One example of this is the last chapter of Thinking and Speech, where, instead of using the concept of sense, Vygotsky used the traditional taxonomy, like needs, motives and interests to refer to the whole character of the individual thinker.

The development of the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical perspective has been our

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² Bozhovich's concept of psychological formation of personality stressed the idea that motives are not entities, but complex systems within which different needs and motives organized around one dominant core of motives, attempting to define a hierarchy of motives that she defined as "orientation of personality". These promising concepts were not completely developed by her and in the end were reduced to some dominant contents. So, the orientations of personality were reduced by her to individualistic and collectivistic actions, and to actions addressed to praxis. *Perezhivanie*, as defined above, is explicitly defined by her as a formation.

³ This quotation, which was taken from the English version of one of the chapters of her book "Personality and its formation in childhood" repeats the mistake of translating *perezhivanie* as experience. As result of this, I replace experience with "*perezhivanie*".

theoretical, epistemological and methodological focus in the last twenty years (González Rey, 1997, 2002, 2005, 2014, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2016, 2017; Mitjans Martínez & González Rey, 2017). This proposal on subjectivity is one of the paths through which the challenge opened up by the Vygotsky-Bozhovich line has been advanced toward a new conception of human mind. The concepts of subjective sense, as qualitative units, within which symbolical processes and emotions turn into one and the same process, is what we defined as the ontological definition of subjectivity from a cultural-historical perspective. Subjective senses represent that link between culture and body that Soviet psychology could not find. The constant interweaving between subjective senses and configurations⁴ defined a new ontological domain for the study of human phenomena.

Final Considerations

Vygotsky's "The Psychology of Art" represented a foundational proposal for a new psychology centered on the integration of emotions, imaginations and fantasy, opening an avenue to advance on a different psychology that he had not been able to achieve when alive. The first ideas by the author related to that focus were addressed toward philosophical and theoretical questions that were completely omitted for decades within Soviet psychology, such as the matter of unconscious processes and the methodological demands of its study, the creation of new emotionally-based realities, the integration of emotions and imagination as one and the same process. All these questions continued to be out far from the focus of most of academic psychology until today.

The paths taken by the new Soviet state, which became an official Marxist State, turned Marxism into a political doctrine. This process led to a unilateral emphasis of the materialism over

dialectics, omitting the anthropological side of the Marx's thought. As result, Soviet sciences were politicized and, in psychology, this polarization appears through the imperative of becoming an objective science. There was no room in this kind of science for Vygotsky's fecund ideas such as the ones presented in "The Psychology of Art".

"The Psychology of Art" was not only directed to finding psychological processes involved with the artistic creation; it was, first of all, a theoretical platform for advancing a new psychology centering the possibility to understand human mind as a creative system culturally and historically engendered. The topics of fantasy, unconscious and fantasy, advanced by Freud, captivated the young Vygotsky. Nonetheless, he opposed the universal and ahistorical character given by Freud to the Unconscious.

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⁴ "Subjective configurations emerge as a self-regulative and generative organization of subjective senses. Subjective configurations are dynamic, but have a relative stability due to the congruency of the subjective senses that they generate" (González Rey, 2017, p.515).

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