

Human Motivation in Question: Discussing Emotions, Motives, and Subjectivity from a Cultural-Historical Standpoint

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ABSTRACT

Vygotsky, at the end of his life, advanced a new representation of a psychological system that was ruled by a cognitive-emotional unity, a theorization that remains inconclusive due to Vygotsky's early death. This article discusses the advances made by Vygotsky in the comprehension of human motivation through his concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* at the end of his work. Through these concepts, he further advanced the discussion of motivation, despite the fact that these concepts have only very recently been considered a relevant part of his legacy in both Russian and Western psychology. This paper discusses the departure from and the historical presentations of the concept of motive in the following two main approaches of Soviet psychology that were mistakenly equated in Western interpretations: Vygotsky's approach, mainly at the first as last moment of his work, and Leontiev's Activity Theory. Based on the final theoretical positions of Vygotsky and of other Soviet authors, and further developing this legacy, this article proposes a new definition of motivation as a specific quality of subjectively configured systems and defines motive as intrinsic to the functioning of all psychological function defines subjective functions as subjectively configured processes. This new proposal of human motivation within a new way of defining subjectivity defines new categories as subjective senses and subjective configurations on which the author bases a specific approach for advancing the topic of subjectivity and motivation within a cultural-historical framework.

Keywords: motive, emotions, subjective senses, subjective configurations

INTRODUCTION

The use of CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory) as a theoretical umbrella that includes Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and Leontiev's Activity Theory

has been considerably popular in Western Psychology. In Soviet psychology, and thereafter in Russian psychology, the relation between these two approaches has been widely questioned (Bozhovich, 1978; Kudriavtsev, 2006; Lektorsky, 1999; Orlov, 2003; A.A. Leontiev, 1992; Yarochevsky 2007; Zinchenko, 2002, 2007). Two of the topics that have been significantly affected as a result of the above mentioned identification between Vygotsky-Leontiev and Luria are motivation and the concept of a psychological system. Meanwhile these concepts were central to Vygotsky in the first and last moments of his work, the concept of object-based activity was central to the Activity Theory.

Soviet psychology represented a complex system of theories and positions that, only in very recent times, has begun to appear in all its complexity and contradictions in Russian and Western psychology (Yasnitsky, 2010, 2012; Zavershneva, 2009, Zavershneva & Osipov, 2010; Zinchenko, 1995; 2002). For decades, there has been limited information on the distortions and omissions in that vein of psychology, which is a result of both the censorship that characterized the Soviet era as a whole and the struggles for power within Soviet psychology (Bruschlinsky, 2001, Archives of the State University of Moscow, 1989).

This article will briefly discuss the different legacies of Vygotsky and Leontiev to study motivation and its consequences for topics such as personality, motivation and subjectivity. Simultaneously, this article further examines the largely overlooked part of Vygotsky's legacy from some of his earliest works that address matters such as emotion, imagination, and fantasy, to which he returned during the final years of his life.

Through the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky took a completely new theoretical path in relation to his "cultural-historical" stance, a definition that has recently been questioned as being created by Vygotsky himself (Yasnitsky, 2012). Rather than using an instrumental definition of psychological functions during the final years of his life, Vygotsky focused on the recognition of cognitive-emotional units, through which a new definition of consciousness and psychical development came to light.

However, at that last moment of his work, Vygotsky had neither health nor sufficient theoretical resources to advance these new and promising ideas, which marked an important turning point in his thinking (Leontiev, 1992; González Rey, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2012). Although clearly present in much of his intellectual production, Vygotsky's efforts to understand the human mind as a cognitive-affective system have been rarely considered as central to the study of his legacy, although they have recently been increasingly recognized by Western authors (Daniels, H, 2007; Fler, M & Hammer, M. 2013; Smogorinsky, 2004).

On the basis of the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*, this article attempts to further advance a new way of understanding motivation as one of the main tenets of a definition of subjectivity within a cultural-historical psychology. Those two concepts, together with the principle of unity between consciousness and activity introduced by Rubinstein, created the basis for advancing on topics omitted or

misunderstood in that vein of psychology, as emotions, motivation and subjectivity. This paper highlights the differences between Leontiev and Vygotsky in their conceptualization of emotions and motive and the consequences of these differences for the path taken by Vygotskian studies after the Soviet era.

THE CONCEPTS OF SENSE AND “PEREZHIVANIE”: A TURNING POINT IN
VYGOTSKY’S COMPREHENSION OF A GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SYSTEM

There is perhaps no other concept in the work of Vygotsky that has been as overlooked and mistreated in Vygotskian studies as the concept of sense. This concept has been frequently translated into English as a synonym for *meaning*, causing great confusion.

As Kudriavtsev noted:

The contribution of L. S. Vygotsky to the elaboration of a general psychological theory was determined before all by the way in which, since the beginning of his work, he formulated his understanding of the cultural-historical determination of individual consciousness on the material of the analysis of “higher” psychology of art as a developing expression of human creativity as resource of the personality and emotional communication of the persons within the space of culture and the time of history, and it was only later that this comprehension extended to the research of the “psychology of the ordinary”: the simple utilitarian (instrumentally mediated) psychological acts (2006, p.6; my translation from Russian).

The author emphasized the foundational character of the Psychology of Art in relation to the principles on which Vygotsky understood the more general proposal of a general psychology. It was not perchance that Vygotsky, after a temporary interruption between 1928 and 1931, returned to art as a relevant question in his work and, consequently, to those topics such as emotion, imagination, fantasy, and personality that he focused in his first works.

With the definition of sense as “the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word” (1987a, p.276), Vygotsky brought to light a new comprehension of consciousness that helps rise above its two reductionist definitions that have largely dominated psychology. First, consciousness as an intrinsic part of the human psyche, and second, consciousness as internalized operations and images, which was dominant in Soviet psychology at that time.

The concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* were developed by Vygotsky at the last moment of his work. *Perezhivanie*, however, was introduced in a very original way in “Psychology of Art”, and it allows us to further consider consciousness as a self-generating system that is developed as a new human quality that emerges along with ongoing social life (Leontiev, A. A, 1992; Yarochevsky, M, 2007). Vygotsky’s most instrumental work centered on psychological functions and on the concepts that support their socio-instrumental genesis; he emphasized that

higher behaviors were synonymous with higher psychological function. In contrast with Vygotsky's positions during that time, the concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense embodied his idea of a psychological unit, which led Vygotsky beyond his previous concepts of mediation and internalization. Systems, rather than functions, were the main focus of Vygotsky's work from 1932–1934. That specific moment of Vygotsky's work has been noted by different authors who have attempted to advance a new interpretation of Vygotsky's work (González Rey, 2011, 2014; Miller, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2012).

Unfortunately, the theoretical immaturity of both concepts—sense and *perezhivanie*, which were not yet explicitly incorporated by Vygotsky into a new type of psychological system—resulted in these concepts being treated separately in different topics on which Vygotsky focused in that last moment of his work. These concepts were neither interrelated nor discussed together by Vygotsky in any of his final works. After Vygotsky's death, the “Decree against Peidology” (1936) implied that his work had been stigmatized in Soviet psychology. Leontiev decisively contributed to this stigmatization (González Rey, 2014). As a result, some of his main ideas between 1932 and 1934 were practically unknown in Soviet psychology until the 1980s, when Vygotsky's Selected Works was published in Russian. *Perezhivanie*, sense and his last ideas related to child development and to emotions were some of Vygotsky's topics that disappeared from Soviet psychology after his death. The study of cognitive functions, particularly memory, perception and attention, became the core of the empirical experimental inquiries conducted under the umbrella of Leontiev's Activity Theory.

As V.P. Zinchenko stated:

A genuine *activity approach* to the human mind started to emerge, and later developed into Activity Theory. Meaning, which Vygotsky regarded as the initial unit of analysis, was relegated to a second or third place of importance [. . .] Meaning was too closely connected to culture, ideal activity and consciousness, all of which had fallen out of fashion during the Soviet period (Zinchenko, 2002a, p.12).

The situation created by the official political recognition of Activity Theory made object-related activity the main concept of Soviet psychology, around which all other psychological themes were explained. This was one of the reasons why concepts such as sense and *perezhivanie*, which embodied cognitive-affective units, were banned from Soviet psychology. Even the concept of meaning was relegated. The “logic of units”, which Vygotsky closely associated with new psychological systems, was replaced by the “logic of psychical functions”, which was based on the internalization of external operations and, according to Leontiev, shared the same structure of internal, psychical operations (Leontiev, 1975).

I attempted to defend the idea that in science the analysis into elements ought to be replaced by analysis which reduces a complex unity, a complex whole, to its units. We have said that, unlike elements, these units represent such products of

analysis which do not lose any of the properties which are characteristic of the whole [. . .] (Vygotsky, 1994/1935, pp. 341–342).

Instead of focusing on isolated internalized psychical functions, Vygotsky centered his attention, in some of his first and last works, on the person as a whole. He returned once again to topics such as consciousness and personality, terms that remained vaguely defined until the end of his work. Vygotsky did not achieve a new ontological definition of human psyche as a culturally configured system able to unify, by its nature, personality and the social world in a new type of psychological system. To further develop this definition, the definition of sense as a psychological unit within a “system of senses” should have replaced his narrow definition of his concept of words’ sense. However, he did not develop this definition.

Furthermore, based on his proposal to replace the idea of elements with the idea of units, the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* were promising for the advancement of a new conception of motivation that centered on cognitive-affective units. The concept of motive has been, to a great extent, treated by psychology as a static entity whose main function is to propel behavior. Vygotsky seemed to search another definition that emphasized the motive as psychological units.

The progress made by Vygotsky between 1932–1934 on topics such as imagination, fantasy, emotion, *perezhivanie*, sense, personality, and consciousness, without establishing relationships among them, made it clear that he advanced a new understanding of human psychology as a system within which psychical functions would be defined not by their main operations but as functions whose sense could not be defined without comprehending their interweaving with other psychological elements, including emotions. A.A. Leontiev discussed the possible consequences of the concept of sense:

Vygotsky’s principal thesis (summarizing the various formulations found in different works) would then be this: There exist a complicated dynamic of senses that include a motivational (affective) side, as well as the will, the dynamic of action and the dynamic of thinking. They can assume various relationships to one another and form diverse “networks”. Intellect, like all higher psychological functions, is subordinated to this system (Leontiev, A.A, 1992, p.43).

The relevance of Leontiev’s assumption is significant and promising. Unfortunately, the author did not return to this matter after this excerpt. The definition of sense as words’ sense was unclear when Vygotsky stated: “Ultimately, the sense of the word depends on one’s understanding of the word as a whole and on the internal structure of personality” (1987a, p.276). The author, in his definition of sense, could not transcend the intellectualism that characterized him throughout his work (Bozhovich, 1968; Yasnitsky, 2012), but he took an important step ahead by making explicit the association between senses and the internal structure of personality, even when he did not explain this association.

Like the concept of sense, the concept of *perezhivanie* is also referred to as a system; if Vygotsky referred to personality in relation to sense, he referred to *perezhivanie* as the unity of “environment and mental features” that defines the relevance of social influence on child development.

[. . .] it would be correct to affirm that the environment determines the child’s development through the *perezhivanie* of the environment. It is most essential, consequently, to deny the absolute indicators of the environment. The child is a part of a social situation; his relationship with the environment and the environment’s relationship with the child occur through *perezhivanie* and the actions of the child. The forces of environment are given meaning through the child’s *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, L. S, 1984b, p.383; my translation from Russian).

The concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense represented psychological units that referred to psychological systems, an idea that Vygotsky never solidified; however, these concepts are so close to each other that it is possible to identify some common issues in them:

Both concepts emerge during human action and involve cognition and emotions within a complex psychical network that is never defined as result of a single external influence. The idea of social determinism, closely associated with the idea of internalization in earlier in his work, was left behind. Sense and *perezhivanie* are not internalized; they emerge on the ongoing human action.

Both concepts refer to personality, a concept that was always very vague in Vygotsky’s work. However, personality was a concept to which Vygotsky always appealed in his effort to propose the idea of a psychological system.

Both concepts are in the thought line defended by Zinchenko when he wrote:

If we accept Elkonin’s idea that Vygotsky’s psychology is of a non-classical kind, we would still need to continue the line of thinking that he started. In doing this, we would need to remove the opposition between subjective and objective dimensions not only in epistemology but also in the ontology of human life (Zinchenko, 2002a, p.5).

This paper follows the path indicated above by Leontiev in an attempt to propose a definition of motivation as a unit that integrates emotions, intellect and action. The concepts of both sense and *perezhivanie* emerge during action, in a way in which the action becomes a psychological production rather than a psychological result. Both Vygotsky and Rubinstein, used the concept of refraction to refer to the processes of personality in an attempt to avoid the idea of reflection in a system that is generative and active by definition. The idea of a psychological system and psychological units could not be developed in depth keeping the stream of psychological life subjected to internalization.

L. Fakhruudinova has recently noted the ontological relevance of the concept of *perezhivanie*:

Their writings (she is referring to Vygotsky and Rubinstein. My note) assign the category of “*perezhivanie*” its ontological status: the very existence of mental reality is realized in the form

of “perezhivanie. This same thought could be expressed thus: “perezhivanie” is a given, a form of existence of “human mind” (2010, p.33).

The formulation of a “system of senses” and *perezhivanie* was, in fact, the prelude to the emergence of the issue of subjectivity on a completely new basis in psychology. In fact, sense and *perezhivanie* are subjective productions because they do not reproduce the external world. On the contrary, these concepts allow for understanding the meaning of social influences on human development through the lenses of new qualitative and singular psychological units. Senses and *perezhivanie* emerge within social historical-cultural experiences, which represent not a reproduction of any social fact or situation but a generative subjective production.

The historical experiences and the complex network of other experiences that take place at any given moment of an individual’s life can only be assembled together as symbolical emotional units. This assemblage would constitute a subjective production that does not result from internalization or from reflection. However, Vygotsky made explicit the implications of sense and *perezhivanie* for advancing a new proposal of psychological systems.

Perezhivanie and sense, in fact, embody motivational force. Both the “system of senses” and *perezhivanie* refers to a person’s position. Both involve emotions, cognition and action, functions that combine themselves in multiple different ways, as A.A. Leontiev (1992) noted. Both concepts emerge from the assemblage of different psychical processes into a new psychological unit.

The difficulty in recognizing the subjective character of psychical processes and systems in Soviet psychology was clearly expressed by Zinchenko in his reconsideration of consciousness as a subjective system. Zinchenko stated:

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

The attempt to transform psychology into a natural and objective science became a considerable barrier to the recognition of subjectivity as an ontological definition of subjectivity and a specific type of human process engendered by the culture within a singular historically constituted social space. However, something that was never considered by Soviet psychology is that culture is also engendered and developed as a subjective system inseparable from the complex and dialectical interweave between social and individual subjectivities (González Rey, 2002, 2011). Paradoxically, despite the explicit positions that identified Soviet psychology as a cultural psychology, its methodological positions attempted to turn psychology

into a natural science, what was a great impediment to the advancement of subjectivity in a dialectical-recursive way, as is defended in this paper. Soviet psychology did not represent a cultural approach in some of its more important theoretical trends. The omission of symbolic themes in Soviet philosophy strongly influenced the narrow treatment of culture, something that impeded further considerations of the subjective character of consciousness, society and culture.

In Vygotsky's terms, activity never appeared to be separated from the psychological organization of a person. Vygotsky emphasized this point as follows: "In my *perezhivanie* is expressed to what extent all my qualities and the way they are constituted during the development are involved here and now, in this particular moment" (1984b, p.383; my translation from Russian). *Perezhivanie* permits us to overcome any remnants of the dualism that characterized the dominant approaches of Soviet psychology during its short history, in which objectivity was so prominent that the person was understood as a product and not as producer. There is an important point of convergence in relation to this concept between Vygotsky and Rubinstein, whose definition of the principle of the unity between consciousness and activity highlighted that activity is not external to the subject's action or operation but a whole moment of the expressions of consciousness, a process that takes place through *perezhivanie*.

In addition to the issues of *perezhivanie* and sense, toward the end of his work, Vygotsky also paid special attention to the active and generative character of emotions for the genesis of new psychological systems. In "On the question of the psychology of the creative artist", originally written in 1932, Vygotsky said: "developing and breaking down their prior relationships, emotions come into new relationships with other elements of psychical life, a new system appears [. . .] units of higher order emerge" (1984a, p.328; my translation from Russian). Vygotsky's attention to higher psychological units emerge from the movement of emotions, as shown in the above quotation, made clear the self-generative character he attributed to inner psychological processes and units, whose movement could be considered more recursive than causal, despite the absence of that term in that historical moment.

However, the unspecific treatment of the topics of motive and need in Soviet psychology did not permit further advancement of the concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense as a new definition of motive. The more static and aprioristic concept of need continued to monopolize the discussion around the topic of motivation in Soviet psychology. Even Vygotsky, after introducing the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*, did not develop a discussion on the traditional way in which the concepts of motive, need, personality and consciousness were treated by Soviet psychology.

Nepomnichaya (1977) highlighted:

The realization of the "activity approach", which had huge relevance for the development of a materialistic psychology, was developed in such a way that it led to a unilateral and limited

representation of the object of psychology. The object of psychology was split into different parts: thinking, sensory processes and activity were split from personality. Personality was described in a narrow way; it was reduced to motives and left out other important dimensions of the subject taken as a whole (1977, pp.72–73; my translation from Russian).

As result of this split between the study of cognitive, sensory processes and activity and the study of personality, the concepts of motive and personality remained underdeveloped and vaguely defined. Only Bozhovich and her team advanced deeply into the study of both motive and personality, combining theoretical elaboration and research. However, there were different attempts to use, theoretically, the concept of motive within Soviet psychology.

ADVANCING A NEW DEFINITION OF MOTIVE IN SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY

The concept of motive, to a large extent, has been considered the drive of behavior, a notion that ultimately leads to the consideration of motive as another psychological process that interacts with other psychological functions. This reductionism has frequently led to a representation of motive as based on an individual's action such that motive appears to be "motive of learning", "motive of playing", "motive of reading", and so on. This does not bring to light the nature of the complex processes in which human action is propelled by motives. Soviet psychology was not an exception in its treatment of motive; on the contrary, some of the more advanced Western theories in the discussion of motivation were far more developed than most Soviet theories, for example, G. Allport and K. Lewin.

The larger barrier to the advancement of the topic of motivation within Soviet psychology was likely its dogmatic interpretation about what Marxist psychology must be. The objective character of psyche was considered the main attribute of the definition of a Marxist psychology. This objective character was always defined by attributes that determined psychological processes through external objects and without taking into consideration the active and self-generative function of the human psyche. Leontiev's definition of motive as the object of activity is a good example of the attempt to turn motive into an objective entity:

I have already said that the actual need is always in need of something, that at the psychological level needs are mediated by psychic reflection and in two ways. On one hand, objects that answer the needs of the subject appear before a person in their objective signal characteristics. On the other hand, the conditions of need in simpler cases signal themselves and are sensorially reflected by the subject as a result of the action of internal receptor stimuli. Here, the most important change that characterizes the transition to the psychological level consists in the beginning of the active connection of needs with the object that satisfies them (Leontiev, 1978, p.116).

The concept of object-based activity appeared as the basis on which the different psychological functions emerge, but the psychological system of these functions

remained completely ignored within this theoretical framework. Needs and objects appeared in Leontiev's definition as aprioristic, i.e., need was defined as something internal, inherent to the person, and objects were defined as something external that appeared objectively to answer the subject's needs. This dualism of "organism-environment" is persistently remarked by Leontiev at different moments in his last book: "[. . .] 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 result of its 'encounter' with the object corresponding to it is it able to become capable of directing and regulating activity" (1975, p.87; my translation from Russian).

Leontiev's blindness to the subjective nature of psychological processes prevented him from avoiding the dualism of "organism-environment" evoked by his definition of need. This dualism has no solution within the more general theoretical basis that underpins Leontiev's Activity Theory. Despite the key place of the concept of activity in Leontiev's definition, activity is for him merely a device through which the "need encountered its object". Activity according to this definition is a passive process through which nothing new is engendered. Unlike Vygotsky, Leontiev lost sight of the person as the active subject of the motive; in his equation, the "need-object" relationship replaced the "motive-person" relationship. Motive is defined, therefore, as occurring inside the system of activity and outside of personality and of the person who is the subject of activity. In that definition, activity replaces both consciousness and personality.

Questioning Leontiev's definition of motive, Bozhovich argued:

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 activity and which the motive (Bozhovich, 1978, pp.19–20; my translation from Russian).

Bozhovich was the first Soviet author to discuss the legacy of Vygotsky in terms of the study of motivation and personality. She advanced further the definitions of motive as a psychological formation and also advanced on the concrete research of personality and motive, which differentiated her from the rest of Soviet psychologists.

Criticism of the limitations of Leontiev's theory came not only from those who historically were his critics, such as the Rubinstein disciples Antsiferova, Abuljanova, and Bruschlinsky, but since the 1990s, new critics have emerged from inside the closed circle of his followers, such as Davydov (2002) and Zinchenko (1995, 2002b, 2009). At the core of the criticism directed toward Leontiev from both groups were the issues of emotions and consciousness in Leontiev's theoretical framework. Davydov stated:

[. . .] emotions are essential to an intellectual plan because based on emotions, the person poses him/herself different tasks, including intellectual ones. And the first time I faced the affirmation

that emotions are more powerful than thought, it was in an unpublished article by V.S. Shadrikov (2002, p. 30; my translation from Russian).

In that article, perhaps the last of his career, Davydov advanced a theory for overcoming the intrinsic rationalism of the Activity Theory by emphasizing cognitive functions as an internalized system of concrete operations with material objects.

The difficulty of the definition of motive in Soviet psychology was not casual; it is impossible to change the definition of motive without replacing the logic centered on the analysis of psyche as functions. As Zinchenko concluded:

Finally, one sometimes also encounters an unjustified narrowing of the subject matter of psychology, for example, when it is defined as the orienting function of various forms of activity, which is equated with the psyche. It is hard to find a place for consciousness in this definition (2009, p.45).

The definition of motive becomes a central issue for differentiating two main theoretical orientations within Soviet psychology, one centered on concrete activity with material objects, to which the object of the need was defined as the motive of activity, exemplified by Leontiev's Activity Theory. The other exemplified by the first and final writings of Vygotsky, which emphasized psychological units and formations as the person's motive, thus resembling more than ever other Soviet classical psychologists such as Ananiev, Miasichev, Bozhovich, and Rubinstein.

The assertion of the active and generative character of the human psychological systems as it was represented by Vygotsky in his last definition of consciousness indicated a shift from the idea of objective determinants of development—on which the concept of leading activity was grounded—to the idea of a psychological system of development as part of the dynamic social practices within which an individual acts. Chudnovsky, who embodied the main “spirit” of Bozhovich's theory, stated:

The general emphasis in studying a person as an object of social development cannot lead to psychological inquiries addressed to the question of subjectivity. This means, in fact, that the excessive and unilateral emphasis on the given external influences and the relevance of the assimilation of the world's objects become the basis for the emergence of consciousness (Leontiev, 1975). The essence of personality is identified by the internalized internal activity and is understood as an internal moment of activity rather than as the subject of the activity (Chudnovsky, 2006, p.78; my translation from Russian).

Chudnovsky's passage was written in the 2000s, when the topic of subjectivity began to be explicitly referred to in Russian psychology with a new basis. It was Chudnovsky, one of the first Russian psychologists of the old generation, who explicitly brought to light the topic of subjectivity during the Soviet era

(Chudnovsky, 1988). The entrance of new languages that permit new concepts shed new light on the relevant questions raised by Vygotsky and Rubinstein regarding consciousness and the unity of consciousness and activity. As will be discussed further, the concept of subjectivity unfolds new paths for the questions that arise through the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*.

The narrow understanding of activity relegated the creative and generative capacity of the individual to the assimilation of external contents and operations, something that highly affected education in Soviet psychology. Education in Soviet times was essentially ruled by the concept of assimilation and was characterized by the interrelated concepts of internalization and reflection (Yakimanskaya, 1989; Zinchenko, 2002a). These concepts were based on the theoretical apparatus of Leontiev's Activity Theory.

Psychical development takes place in a process of assimilation of the person's socio-historical experience [. . .] It should be emphasized that the process of "assimilation" should not be opposed to the process of "development" because the first appeared as the general way of realizing the second (Davydov, Elkonin, Markova, 1978, p. 182; my translation from Russian).

Centered on the concept of leading activity¹, these authors based their understanding of development on the view that assimilation should be treated as the "general way of realizing development". In that definition, nothing new emerges in development. More recently, Davydov, Zinchenko, and Talizina have argued:

Particularly important is the fact that the starting genetic form of all types of activity is the external object-based activity. Internal activity is secondary; it is organized through the process of internalization of the external object-based activity [. . .] In relation to that movement, it is important to identify two important moments. First, in the process of internalization, a transition takes place not only from external to internal but also from collective to individual activity (Davydov, Zinchenko & Talizina, 1982, p.62; my translation from Russian.)².

As is made clear in the above quotation, internal activity is an epiphenomenon of and secondary to external activity. The authors referred to both types of processes as activities, a position that both Davydov and Zinchenko would criticize two decades later. This approach led to a narrow representation of culture based on practical and productive activities. The reification of object-based activity does not permit one to consider society as a complex shared symbolic system of practices, institutions, and relationships; it also impedes the understanding of motive as a productive, generative system that cannot be explained by assimilation or by internalization.

In my view, the concepts of consciousness and personality were the only way that Soviet psychologists had to address the matter of human subjectivity. As Tolstyx noted:

Recently, it is possible to observe researchers' growing interest on questions of subject and subjectivity. It is possible to say that these issues have progressively found their place which, in the second half of the XX century, was occupied by the research of personality (2008, p.134–135; my translation from Russian).

Undoubtedly, the study of the human mind as a creative and generative system that continuously transcends the conditions within which it develops must be further advanced through theoretical issues that were never discussed in Soviet psychology, particularly in relation to the symbolical-emotional character of the human mind. Assuming that the human mind represents a distinctive quality, particular attention should be paid to the emotional changes that are expressed under new conditions. This implies moving ahead on the symbolic processes that were narrowly treated by Soviet psychology, within which the symbolic was mainly reduced to signs (Zinchenko, 1993, 2009).

Bozhovich and her group advanced a new concept of motivation founded on the concept of psychological formation, a term frequently used by Vygotsky in his final works. The concept of psychological formation embodied Vygotsky's theoretical pretension to emphasize units and systems instead of psychological functions or elements. "This kind of complex activity, one that exceeds the boundaries of the processes that we habitually call functions, can be called psychological systems" (Vygotsky, 1987b, p.348).

Aside from the fact that Vygotsky understood the systems in terms of relationships between different psychological processes and functions, the idea of system allowed him to advance further the theoretical construction of complex psychological units from being irreducible to the notion of object or operation as primarily external to being internal. This principle, which ruled by the Activity Theory, made it impossible to think of motivation as a system, and it confined the concept of motive to objects.

Bozhovich's definition of motivation as *psychological formations* of personality appeared to be an explanation for psychological concepts such as moral ideals, self-evaluation and intention that were characterized as complex motivational systems, integrating groups of psychological needs mediated by individual consciousness. This new and unprecedented definition of motivation appeared in her following statement:

The person, as a personality, is characterized by the existence of particular points of view, moral values, and vital goals that the person attempts to achieve during his life. All these psychological processes made the individual relatively stable in his/her positions and independent from the immediate influence of the surrounding environment (Bozhovich, 2009, pp.364–365; my translation from Russian).

Motivation, thus, began to be understood as a subjective production emancipated from its immediate social influences.

ADVANCING FURTHER IN THE DEFINITION OF MOTIVE AS A COMPLEX
SUBJECTIVE SYSTEM: APPROACHING SUBJECTIVITY FROM A
CULTURAL-HISTORICAL STANDPOINT

Notwithstanding the explicit references to subjectivity in Soviet psychology since the 1970s (Abuljanova, 1973; Chudnovsky, 1988), there has been no definition of subjectivity that specifies its qualitative differentiating nature. The precarious treatment of the topic of subjectivity in Soviet psychology was clearly noted by Abuljanova:

The attempt to materialize the psyche or assign it materiality through its identification with something different reveals the anti-dialectical character of this form of knowledge and the inability to apply dialectic to the discovery of the specificity of psychic phenomena (1973, p.49; my translation from Russian).

Despite the fact that the topic of subjectivity began to broaden in Russian psychological literature after the Soviet period, the creation of categories that enabled the overcoming of the individualistic and intrapsychic definition of this term did not permit the advancement of this matter. As Stephen Frosh noted:

Written more simply and generally, the issue here is how one can describe the human subject in a way that accounts for the richness of what is usually taken to be “inner life” (fantasies, desires, affects and the like) yet also recognizes how each of us is constituted first and foremost as a social being (2010, pp.38–39).

What Frosh brings to light is a debt within the cultural-historical approach that historically has been more oriented to focusing on cognitive function, action, and mediation rather than on the complex system of “inner life” in which the socially lived experience is subjectively organized as a complex motivational system. Concepts such as sense and *perezhivanie* were treated by Vygotsky “as inner complex systems” with a cultural-historical genesis. Both concepts permit further advancement of the study of the richness of the inner life from a cultural-historical standpoint.

As a doctoral student in the laboratory headed by Bozhovich in the 1970s, my doctoral thesis was based on concrete research about the relationships between two psychological formations of personality: professional intentions and moral ideals (González Rey, 1979). My personal experiences after the discussions in the laboratory and after the instigating reflections of my tutor, V.Chudnovsky, convinced me of the need to advance beyond the subjective side of motivation and personality after obtaining my doctoral degree.

My studies on personality and motivation had led me to the topic of subjectivity, in which the concepts of sense, *perezhivanie* and psychological formation were a great inspiration (González Rey, 2009). My reflection of the strong and weak

points of these concepts enable me to advance the idea of psychological concepts that are simultaneously understood as processes engaged in ongoing human performance and as units of a psychological system. My definitions of *subjective sense* and *subjective configurations* make it possible for me to develop this articulation, introducing in their definition a new quality of the human mind defined by the unity between symbolical processes and emotions as result of which human performances are turned into subjective creations.

The concepts of *subjective sense* and *subjective configuration* were introduced as a way to shed light on the subjective character of human experiences and psychological operations. Subjective senses are symbolic-emotional units that emerge as the subjective side of human experiences, in the manner in which experience appeared for an individual in his different social relations. Subjective sense is in an endless movement, over the course of which dynamic chains of subjective senses emerge and within which one subjective sense continuously integrates into others to form subjective configurations. In turn, this dynamic process of subjective senses transforms itself into a self-regulatory and generative open subjective system whose movement becomes a permanent source of new subjective senses in ongoing human performance. These self-regulatory and generative subjective systems are subjective configurations.

Subjective sense and configurations are two inseparable moments that have such a close and recursive relation that one is configured into the other. As a result of this capacity to generate subjective senses, subjective configurations become the main motive of any human action, but they are not external to the action; on the contrary, subjective configuration represents the subjective nature of human action. This definition characterizes the concept of subjective configuration as continuously engaging in action, which expresses the comprehension of motivation as a system, transcending the idea of motive as just another psychological entity that influences the action from inside. The concept of subjective configuration breaks down the dichotomies between the external—internal, and the social and individual that are currently considered in psychology.

Subjective configurations simultaneously embody subjective senses that are an expression of the subject's subjective productions in different moments of the subject's history and in different areas of the subject's life, becoming a powerful motivational system within which new subjective senses emerge in the course of the different actions, operations and human performances that are performed as subjective productions. The different operations and processes that emerge in the course of any human performance are subjectively configured in the continuous process of the action. The qualitative side of human experience is inherent to any human reality. Subjectivity is not the reaction of our mind to a given world and reality; it is part of the complex reality lived by human beings not as reactive beings but as creative generative ones.

Subjective senses and configuration are concepts that express the diversity of human life in all its richness. The social instances are also subjectively configured

in what define as social subjectivity. Individual and social subjectivities reciprocally configure one another in and through social life, but each is also grounded in different systems; while individual subjectivity is grounded in individual histories, social subjectivity is grounded in individual action but at the same time in social processes that frequently are beyond individual representations. Social subjectivity emerges in and through the different social symbolical normative systems of discourses and representations that, in different ways, rule the institutional systems of society and the diversity of social practices that take place in society. This complex network of social symbolical regulation is subjectively configured in each person or social instance in different ways. Subjective senses, unlike sense as defined by Vygotsky, **are not cognitive-emotional units but symbolic emotional ones.**

This active character that Vygotsky ascribed to emotions in “Psychology of Art” and at the end of his work is emphasized by the concepts of subjective senses and configurations (González Rey, 1995, 2002, 2009), in which emotions always lead to the emergence of new symbolical processes, which in turn evoke emotions and configure endless chains of subjective senses that are organized as subjective configurations in the course of human action. This system of subjective senses and configurations in process is what is defined here as subjectivity. This position defines emotions as inseparable from subjectivity. Through the lens of this proposal, emotions are always intrinsic to subjective configurations.

Subjective sense and subjective configuration permit a representation of the human psyche that cannot be reduced to the sum of psychological functions as separated entities, but that leads to the comprehension of them as operations subjectively organized in the ongoing human actions. The comprehension of subjectivity as a system that endlessly moves through the constant emergence of subjective configurations distinguishes itself for overcoming the one-way formulas of external-internal relationships as the model for understanding the social-individual relationships. The subjective configurations simultaneously organize the subjectivity at individual and social levels as part of two recursively interrelated systems. The subjective configurations in both levels influence each other not as one being external to the other but as one becoming part of the other through the subjective senses that emerge over the course of the recursive movement between social and individual subjectivity. Despite the recursive and reciprocal relationships between configurations of social and individual subjectivity, such relationships as systems tend to be more contradictory than harmonious.

Socio-cultural experience always carries a symbolical character that is a part of the concreteness of social life; socially constructed attributes such as race, gender, economic status, age, and others are not considered as being part of individuals and groups as signified conscious meanings but are subjectively configured as subjective senses within singular subjective configurations. Subjective senses are very dynamic and malleable subjective units whose course is inseparable from other senses that permanently emerge as a result of the dynamic of the subjective

configuration, within which they emerge and continuously unfold into new subjective senses in an endless movement that distinguishes human experience as subjective.

Subjective configurations, unlike other concepts addressed in psychological literature as the concept of self, as it is discussed by constructivism and co-constructivism, do not center on meanings and do not refer to the self-evaluative functions of the subject or consciousness. On the contrary, both subjective senses and subjective configurations embody the generative character of emotions in their plasticity to evoke symbolic processes and to be evoked by them.

The definition of motives as subjective configurations, which in turn are subjective units of a more encompassing subjective system such as personality, allows for the advancement of the study of issues such as emotions, personality, and motivation, topics that remained stragglers in the study of the cognitive processes in this theoretical framework. Subjective configurations are responsible for the “colors” through which the word acquires human relevance.

In fact, subjective configurations exist on two different levels. First, they are units of personality, which leads to a completely new definition of personality as a system of subjective configurations in process, whose presence in human action is not a priori or a determinant of action. Second, they are specific subjective senses that emerge in the subjective configurations of the action, within which the presence of personality is a qualitative moment of one ongoing process that should be defined through interpretation. This definition permits further advancement of a new representation of personality that overcomes any metaphysical remnant in its definition. Advancing an ontological definition of subjectivity as a quality whose presence distinguishes every human action or performance, whether social or individual, is also important to overcome the dichotomy between individual and social phenomena. Personality is, above all, a motivational system that is a permanent part of the ongoing human experience.

FINAL REMARKS

The focus of this article is to study human motivation as a subjective production instead of as just another function or operation within the logic that has been widely employed by psychology in the study of cognitive functions. In this paper, motivation is not understood as just another function or specific psychological content oriented to drive behavior. Motivation is intrinsic to the subjective configurations in which the different individual functions and relationships are organized. Subjective configurations are organized through the ongoing course of any human experience as its subjective side, a reason why motivation is not extrinsic to action or psychological function but is intrinsic to their subjective configuration.

Vygotsky's concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*, elaborated by the author during the final years of his life, were concepts that implicitly rescued the generative character of consciousness in its function to represent the world. Both concepts were "psychological systems", which, from Vygotsky's point of view, were characterized as cognitive-emotional units. They were part of an effort to define new representations of consciousness and psychical development that represented an alternative theoretical path, different from the one that centered on mediation, signs, psychological functions, and internalization, topics that ruled Vygotsky's main works between 1928 and 1931. Vygotsky's definitions of sense and *perezhivanie* were largely ignored by Soviet and Western psychology. These concepts embodied the principle of unity between consciousness and activity proposed by Rubinstein, whose works in the 1930s and 1940s centered on advancing the idea of psychological systems through his definitions of personality and consciousness.

Subjective sense and subjective configurations followed the line "Vygotsky-Rubinstein" addressed to emphasize the idea of a system over the idea of function. This paper advances further a new ontological definition of subjectivity not as an intrapsychic individual structure but as a living system of subjective configurations that are simultaneously organized in social instances and in the individuals who share these social moments. What defines the pertinence of the topic of subjectivity within a cultural-historical theoretical framework is not its intrapsychic character but its ontological qualitative nature as a symbolical emotional system that is able to embody all human systems and actions, whether social or individual.

The concept of subjective configuration accounts for the richness of what has usually been defined as an "internal world" and, at the same time, enables us to understand the genesis of the "inner world" as an expression of a social instance. That is to say, the "inner world" is configured in the singular interplay of subjective senses and subjective configurations, which represent the motivational core of any individual psychological function and social action.

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NOTES

¹ Fundamental activity was defined by A.N. Leontiev (1972) as follows: "Fundamental activity—is that activity, whose development determines the more important changes in

the psychical processes and psychological characteristics of the child's personality in every stage of its development" (pp. 506).

² It should be said that Davydov, in his final writings, changed his position in relation to Leontiev's definition of activity, and Zinchenko has consistently been a very important critic of the activity approach since the 1990s, making interesting contributions for new interpretations of Soviet psychology.

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