

Is there a “Vygotskian Materialism”? Ontological and epistemological concerns for a contemporary Marxist Psychology (Part I)

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In this work divided in two papers (the first paper is published in the current number of the journal), I claim that Vygotsky created his own psychological marxist materialism, rather than applicated dialectical materialism to Psychology. For this, I perform an immanent analysis that strives for understanding Vygotsky’s psychological framework. Therefore, both papers stress similarities and differences between his work and that of authors like Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, Spinoza and others. The first paper briefly exposes the schism between Eastern and Western Marxism, - background, in which Vygotsky deployed his philosophical concerns in early psychological works (particularly “Educational Psychology”, 1924, and “Psychology of Art”, 1925) and parts of the “Historical Meaning of Crisis in Psychology” (1927). The paper presents the implications of ideas like “reality”, “nature”, the “psychophysical problem” and others for a materialist psychology.

Keywords: *Vygotsky, Materialism, Marxism in Psychology, Epistemology of Psychology, Critical Psychology, Consciousness*

Along the bumpy publishing of Vygotsky in East and West, two important questions have been asked, particularly by his leftist readers, (1) Would Vygotsky have been developing a Marxist Psychology?, and (2) What would be the meaning of his proposal for a Marxist Psychology in its four basic senses (ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political)? Such questions are fundamental for a critical assessment of the psychology in Soviet Union and its meaning for a Psychology committed to a socialist ethos.

Although much was written about these questions (see Veresov, 2005; Ratner, 1995; Joravsky, 1989; Leontiev, 1991; Shuare, 1990; Duarte, 2000), his leftist readers have not been addressing many philosophical concerns regarding Vygotsky’s interpretation of Marxist authors. Previously, I analyzed Marxist pathways between Spinoza and Vygotsky (Toassa, 2014), and hereby I claim that Vygotskian reflections on psychological Materialism qualify his perspective as a new form of Marxist Materialism¹. Although incomplete, Vygotsky’s Psychology is a Marxist approach in the ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political sense. In order to fulfill this goal, it is essential to perform a substantial historical research on Soviet sciences in its multiple shifts as well as on scientific practices and target audiences to which the author addressed (see Yasnitsky, 2009).

In terms of method, I perform an *immanent analysis*² that strives for understanding Vygotsky’s psychological framework, departing from his own reasoning, against the assumption that Vygotsky has *applicated* the dialectical materialism to Psychology (see

¹ As Veresov (1999;2005) realized, Vygotsky’s perspective and methods changed their focus from reflexes in the early writings (1917-1924) through social behaviour (1925-1927) to later works which display a truly cultural-historical approach.

² The Spinozist idea of an *immanent efficient causality* criticizes the scholastic tradition that places God apart from Nature, or causes external to their effects. In this way, one ought to understand God, Nature, Real, and Substance as equivalent, infinite beings. Spinoza’s “Ethics” exposes an epistemology in that it is only possible to understand causes in their immanent effects (Chau, 1999), meaning, it is impossible to split metaphysical, ontological, ethical and epistemological comprehension of reality. Albeit not fully developed, the “immanent analysis” is an intellectual experience in that we try to understand the ideas in their concrete consequences – similarly to our present political movements.

Elhammouni, 2002)³, once he openly denied this relation (Vygotski, 1991, p.389). From my perspective, the idea of this application tends to blur important differences among Vygotsky's oeuvre and other Marxist psychologies (particularly, those that are more indebted to Lenin's reflection theories, as Leontiev's or Rubinshtein's Activity Theory, see Leontiev, 1978a;1978b; Parker, 1999). It overlooks important aspects of Vygotsky's creative Marxism on such subjects as psychological objectivity, psyche (spirit) and dualism. An immanent analysis must assess Vygotsky's truly relation with Marxist classical texts. Moreover, it is important to remember his recurrent diagnosis that the relationship between Marxism and psychology had never been done departing from the Psychology's standpoint, a major task that he starts to perform in the "Historical Meaning [Sense] of the Crisis in Psychology"⁴ (which I abbreviate as HMCP from now on) (Vygotsky, 1991;1987)².

Therefore, these two articles seek for studying Vygotsky's Marxism in his ontological and epistemological concerns. In order to make the point that he developed a singular form of Materialism, I aim to stress similarities and differences between his work and that of authors like Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, Spinoza and others. These papers pay attention on understanding particularly Vygotsky's epistemological and ontological ideas as crucial for foundations of his own Materialist perspective on Psychology.

My ultimate goal is to help constructing a Psychology committed to a socialist *ethos*; that is, the political liberation of the oppressed people, guided by Vygotsky's ethical-political claim towards the creation of a new man for a new society (see Vygotsky, 2003; Vygotski, 1991; Yasnitsky, 2011).

To my view, there are remarkable political implications of understanding consciousness:

(1) According to a mechanical epistemology, consciousness is an epiphenomenon or only simple "reflection of objective reality" only (as in the Marxism-Leninist worldview, as well as some sections of Lenin's "Materialism and Empiriocriticism"), that must be adjusted to the "correct" consciousness assumed by the Communist vanguard (see Lenin, 1975).

(2) consciousness is regarded as phenomenon, restricted to the external relation between the individual and his/her environment, or in a broader perspective which envelops "psychophysical aspects" (meaning, body-mind relations, mostly implied in affections), or as a real 'subject matter' embedded in body, environment (*srieda*) and its development, as Vygotsky (1991;1987) claimed.

In his war against dualism, interrupted by tuberculosis, he certainly hesitated among different subject matters to Psychology (such as consciousness, person and personality). This hesitation has probably hindered the comprehension of his specific ontology and epistemology, as well as many other reasons, that can have prevented readers from assessing his brilliant remarks on materialism (problems in editions, contemporary agendas for Historical-Cultural Activity Psychology etc). In the long term, I claim his ideas in order to discuss social change in a conjuncture of political disarray for the working class, which seeks for a new consciousness, new plots, and new forms of political organization (Antunes & Alves, 2004). To comprehend a Vygotskian materialism and develop its theoretical and practical consequences for anti-capitalist struggle is a challenge broader than Psychology itself – and certainly, it is part of the efforts to assess Soviet socialism as well.

³ "It is through such a creative and concrete application of dialectical materialism that psychology can escape the grip of ossification and orthodoxy" (id, p.92)

⁴ The published editions incorrectly translate the word "meaning" to "smysl" (sense), from the original title: "Istoricheskiy smysl psihologicheskogo krizisa" (see Vygotsky, 1982).

⁵ As Yanchar notes (see Goertzen, 2008, p.832), psychology lacks both an explicit ontology and an indigenous epistemology.

It is a current challenge to make Vygotskian ideas meeting the needs of social movements worldwide. As D'Andrea suggests, analyzing Brazilian 2013's protests,

this crisis expresses a reemerging type of revolutionary subjectivity which, in turn, is being fueled by the dissemination of digital flexibilities propelling a new media imaginary. While partly singular, the Brazilian case also resonates with the current wave of global popular protests, providing elements that suggest new forms of popular mobilization in the making. (2014, p.935)

This *first article* briefly analyzes the *schism* between Eastern and Western Marxism with regard to ideas on sciences of Nature and Society. Thereafter, it exposes Vygotsky's philosophical concerns in early psychological works ("Educational Psychology", 1924, and "Psychology of Art", 1925) and the HMCP. I review his remarks on Marxism and the subject matter of Psychology against the backdrop of early philosophical influences, especially Marx, Plekhanov and Spinoza.

The *second article* outlines problems of edition and references in the HMCP, being heavily concentrated in the variety of epistemological and ontological topics that Vygotsky presented on the subject matter of Psychology and how can one understand consciousness (immediate experience, psyche, mind) as historical-natural subject - a *real* process/system in continuous change. His creative Materialist reasoning leads to the amazing conclusions that one can (1) understand even such psychological phenomenon as consciousness objectively, (2) there is a confusion between spirit and subjectivity – and the latter is not the subject matter for Psychology.

Ontological and Epistemological Questions to Psychology (and How They Appear in Vygotsky's Early Psychological Works)

The word *Psychology* refers to a subject matter, or a field of topics, or a discipline, or a profession (Teo, 2009). Highlighting status quo of Psychology as a problematic field, the author explains three groups of concerns to which one should address when speaking about its problematic foundations – *ontological, epistemological, and ethical*. The ontological dimension of Psychology refers to the study of Being, or of the fundamental characteristics of reality. Ontological concerns involve questions about specific features of the psychological subject matter (its object of knowledge): is it consciousness, or subjectivity, or personality, or behaviour? How can we understand the mind-body problem in this subject matter? Which theories of human nature underlie the development of a cultural-historical Psychology? And I must add: is Psychology a natural science, or a social science, or a science which intermediates these fields, or none of these options? Where should it place itself?

Typically, epistemological concerns require reflections on the nature of knowledge and the ways of achieving it. Ontology and epistemology are, in practice, intertwined. Ontological assumptions have epistemological and methodological consequences (see Teo, 2009), in spite of being ignored by mainstream psychology, and it is one of reasons to say why psychology is a problematic field. However, as recognized by many (Danziger, 1994;1997; Parker, 1989; Smith, 2005; Figueiredo, 2010; Teo, 2009; Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009), its philosophical notions are implicit, not based upon a critical reasoning by the researchers themselves and only make full sense when embedded in the culture and society in which they were developed. Hacking (1995) claims that "concepts on behavior, act or temperament are formulated in the hope of immediate or future interventions in the lives of individual human beings" (p.351). All concepts on humans have practical purposes, even when they are theoretical – Danziger (1990), in a critique of Psychology as a positivistic "natural science", considers that Psychologies, rather not being speculative, interact with

society in order to gather benefactors, customers, public funding and many other sources of political power.

Nature, Partyiness and Society Under the Banner of Marxism

When the subject is Vygotsky, it must be observed that a major task of the Dictatorship of Proletariat, mostly after the Bolsheviks won the Civil War (1918-1921), was to create a new society. The enormous Russian Empire whose landscapes looked like uncultured Nature was ready to be transformed by no one man but all Russian people on its own behalf. To fulfill this goal, it was mandatory to deploy a new range of proletarian sciences, especially after when Lenin issued the Decree “On the Significance of Militant Materialism” (1922, see Lenin, 1972), thereby pushing the *intelligentsia* to strive for Materialism in all fields of knowledge (see van der Veer & Valsiner, 2001). Yet, according to Lenin’s view of *partijnost*⁶, the pursuit of a proletarian knowledge would should not be directly controlled by the Party (see Joravsky, 1961).

Contrary to Western structure of sciences which – roughly speaking – separated human and natural sciences (aspect that influenced Wundt’s creation of a Physiological Psychology and Folk Psychology, see Araujo, 2006), Russian Marxists tried to bring all sciences under the Marxist umbrella – or *Under the Banner of Marxism*⁷. As Marcuse (1958) realized, Marxist principles were to transform the previous foundational institutions and objectives that should fit the new society. These statements were inserted into a historical dynamics which surpasses the intentions of the leadership and to which the manipulators themselves may succumb.

A few words must be said in justification of such an approach. Marxian theory purports to be an essentially new philosophy, substantially different from the main tradition of Western philosophy. Marxism claims to fulfill this tradition by passing from ideology to reality, from philosophical interpretation to political action. For this purpose, Marxism redefines not only the main categories and modes of thought, but also the dimension of their verification; their validity is to be determined by the historical situation and the action of the proletariat. (Marcuse, 1958, p.9)

This was the historical context in which ontological, epistemological and ethical differences between Vygotskian and classical German Psychology started to form. A *schism* between Eastern and Western Marxism evolved especially after Communist revolutions (see Hunt, 2009; Marcuse, 1958, and Foster, 2013). The main disagreement was: must materialist dialectics be applied only to the human realm – society and history – or to nature and natural sciences as well? Lukacsian classical argument in “History and Class Consciousness” (see Foster, 2013; Royale, 2014) is that Engels followed Hegel’s mistaken lead of applying dialectics to nature in his unfinished work, “Dialectics of Nature” (Engels, 1979). As Foster remarks:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this stricture for Western Marxism, which saw it as one of the key elements separating Marx from Engels and Western Marxism from the Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals. It heralded a move away from the direct concern with issues of material nature and natural science that had characterized much of Marxian thought up to that point. (2013, p.2)

⁶ Literally: Party-ness (see Yasnitsky, 2009, p.43).

⁷ *Under the banner of Marxism* was the philosophical Journal of Sciences Academy and mouthpiece for the Communist Party (see Kremmentsov, 1997).

However, although Marx wrote less about natural sciences than Engels, Marx treated with respect for the opinion of Engels. Engels has studied natural sciences more than Marx and they did not disagree in their views (see Hunt, 2009, and Joravsky, 1961). Yet, according to many Western scholars (Foster, 2013), Engels matched social laws to objective natural laws, feeding a mechanical materialism that quickly degenerated in a Stalinist rhetoric marked by a few ideas on “Historical Materialism” and “Dialectical Materialism” (a distinction first stressed by Plekhanov, according to Hunt, 2009⁸). However, Stalin’s perspective became the mainstream trend in Soviet Marxism only after the Great Break (1929-1932, see Todes & Krementsov, 2010). As well, Soviet Union inserted his “vulgar materialism” in the referred Internationals, influencing – mostly, not for good – proletarian movements worldwide (see Marcuse, 1958; Deutscher, 1970).

Stalin’s mechanical materialism stressed the end of an era favorable to Leninist *partijnost* in sciences. It was far from expressing the variety of comments which has swarmed within Soviet philosophy of sciences, related to Nineteenth-century discussions of Spinoza, Hegel, Marx and Engels (as well as Plekhanov and Lenin as their interpreters) with regard to development of a Materialism (Maidansky, 2003). Focusing on Vygotsky Circle, Yasnitsky (2009, p.45) identifies during the 1920s a four-layer structure of scientific knowledge and social practice, from the most general and abstract level to less general and more concrete (Marxist philosophy, general [scientific] theory, mid-level applied theories, social practice)⁹. One can relate this layer-structure to Joravsky’s perception (1961, p.5), that Marx & Engels’s philosophy did not appear to be an isolated science. It could be understood as a Marxist *mirovozzvorenie* (worldview) crossing the borders between Philosophy, Science and Social Practice.

The meaning of dialectics itself was disputed: Joravsky (1961, p.80-81) describes how Lenin (1972) claimed for a reinterpretation of Hegelian Dialectics to natural sciences and materialism. However, his programme went unnoticed in that time. As to Yasnitsky’s analysis (2009), the Great Break introduced a new *partijnost*: a control of sciences by the Communist Party of Soviet Union, sponsoring “practicality” as a dogma. Sciences had to impact practical construction of socialism in ways that the Party could understand. To replace the four-layer structure, the Soviet State gave birth to a two-layer hybrid of Marxist philosophy and general theory (plus social practice and applied disciplines).

The Second Psychoneurological Congress (1924) had opened the campaign for a Marxist reconstruction of Psychology. Kornilov hired Vygotsky to Moscow’s Institute of Psychology (Joravsky, 1989). Vygotsky’s deployment of a materialist Psychology (1924-1934) was a major hard issue that approached the three philosophical concerns, above described by Teo (2009), as well as observing the four-layer structure identified by Yasnitsky.

⁸ “Dialectical materialism has been widely thought of as the PHILOSOPHY of Marxism, in contrast and relation to Marxist science, distinguished as historical materialism. The term was probably first used by Plekhanov in 1891” (Edgley, 1991, p.142). The creation of the “Dialectical Materialism” meant the attempt at expanding Marx thought as a worldview. To Hunt (2009), Plekhanov, although standing out by Engels’ belief, dissented from the top-down revolution that Lenin advocated. To Foster, Western Marxism regarded Engels’s views as “deemphasizing the role of the subjective factor (or human agency), reducing Marxism to mere conformity to objective natural laws, giving rise to a kind of mechanical materialism or even positivism” (2013, p.3). On Soviet Positivist Marxism, see also Yasnitsky (2009).

⁹ Many disciplines and intellectual movements competed with psychology for “the status of the general theory of psychical processes and for dominance over entire field of human sciences, most notably psychoanalysis, reflexology, and reactology” (Yasnitsky, 2009, p.40). One can assort applied theories such as paedology and defectology among social practices developed by Vygotsky Circle.

Some of Vygotsky's Early Works: the Object of Psychology in an Ontological and Epistemological Approach

In the very first chapter of his first psychological book, “Educational Psychology” (1924), Vygotsky reflects upon the subject matter of Psychology and its evolution from metaphysical ideas about human soul to a natural science for which consciousness is *internal movement*. He freely mentions Psychology “which North-American psychologists name as a science of behavior of living organisms” (Vygotsky, 2003, p.38). Such psychologists understood behavior as any movement, external or internal, of a living organism, and those views were transforming Psychology into a biological science of behavior as interaction between organism and environment. As human beings only contact nature through environment, “Psychology studies the behavior of social man and laws by which this behavior changes” (p.40). Here was his first attempt of defining an subject matter of knowledge which had to be totally overcome by a future development of a new Psychology.

Vygotsky aimed at reading the “old Psychology” (term which, roughly speaking, includes German schools directly connected to Wundt's physiological psychology, as Leipzig and Würzburg School as well as William James's works, see Toassa, 2013) through the science of conditioned reflexes. The experiment was *the* acceptable method to this new natural science. However, from this basically reductionist pledge that was commonplace among Russian Marxists (Joravsky, 1989), Vygotsky gradually introduces a more holistic and integrative approach. “Educational Psychology” is a bewildering book, despite the initial claim for a new reading of the old Psychology through the science of conditioned reflexes¹⁰. An integrative analysis of *reactions*, embedded in Kornilov's reactology, was more important than the notion of *reflex* (Toassa, 2013)¹¹. As we can see below:

The concept of reaction helps incorporate human behavior to the long series of biological motion adaptation of all organisms, from lower to higher in; [help us] to link it to the fundamentals of organic life on earth, discover the unlimited prospects for the study of evolution and consider the biological aspect of behavior more broadly. (Vygotsky, 2003, p.49)

Vygotsky argues that reflex is a strict physiological concept; but a reaction is a wider biological concept. It is difficult to precise the sources for his early holism¹². As Veresov (2005) argues, Vygotsky's philosophical orientation was broader than Marxism and his first attempt of deploying a Marxist Psychology as a monistic and materialist science was rather Pavlovian than truly based upon a Marxist ontology and epistemology. Through an analysis of references and its disposition in “Educational Psychology”, one identifies dispersion and eclecticism. Engels and Plekhanov, so important to the HMCP, are not cited yet.

However, Vygotsky's pupils claimed that Vygotsky studied Marx, Engels & Plekhanov before the Revolution (see Joravsky, 1989). In spite of not quoting Plekhanov in the “Educational Psychology”, a Plekhanovist thinking is developed in the “Psychology of Art” (composed mostly between 1917 and 1924, that was very close to time of “Educational

¹⁰ Suitable to Party's mainstream perspective on how to develop a materialist psychology, see Joravsky (1987) and Kremontsov (1997).

¹¹ Hence, Kornilov's reactology, meaning “science of reactions”, is very important to Vygotsky's attempt at overcoming the dualism imprinted in the Psychology. To Yasnitsky, reactology was “supported in mid-1920s by the group of newly recruited employees of the Institute of Psychology including Artemov, Dobrynin, Gellershtein, Vygotsky, and Luria—although their fascination with the promise of reactology was fairly short-lived” (2009, p.49).

¹² Even V. Vernadsky, a biophysicist extremely popular in Russia from twenties, could have influenced it.

Psychology”, see Veresov, 1999; van der Veer & Valsiner, 2001). Plekhanov’s “Fundamental problems of Marxism” (Plekhanov, 1908/1969; quoted in the HMCP) is crucial to “Psychology of Art”, and could have been an early source for his monism.

In his memories, Luria (1992) reports that, when a group of researchers interested in constructing a Marxist Psychology formed around Vygotsky from 1924 and onwards, the Belorussian (L. Vygotsky) changed their focus from Höfdding and others to studies of Marx’s “Capital”. Other evidences confirm Luria’s report: a popular idea from Capital was borrowed by Vygotsky (1999b; 2003) - “from the very beginning, the worst architect differs from the best bee in that before building the cell of wax, he already has built it in his head” (Vygotsky, 2003, p.256). This brief statement highlighted the correspondence between objective reality and human consciousness, yet did not bring deeper philosophical consequences to the structure of the book. Further reflections in 1925 (Vygotsky, 1999b) criticized dualism bringing up an ontological concern on the subject matter of Psychology – as science of consciousness *or* behavior. The “architect” analogy displays the unity between planning and action. As Joravsky says, “He was seeking unified understanding of human beings as natural objects with conscious minds” (1989, p.261).

Defending a Marxist reading of Vygotsky’s psychology, Elhammouni assumes (from a casual Vygotsky’s remark in “Educational psychology”), that “*social relations of production* is the appropriate unit of analysis of human mental phenomena” (p.89). Albeit providing a household concept to Marxist readers familiar with Marx & Engels critique of political economy, to my view, this Elhammouni’s interpretation overlooked that the “Educational Psychology” was written before the conception of the method of unit of analysis (see Veresov, 1999, p.227), which signaled a more developed psychological materialism with the genesis of Historical-Cultural Psychology by L.S. Vygotsky.

In my perspective, the most important Marxist “philosophical bud” to Psychology in the “Education Psychology” is at page 40, that present other ideas which Vygotsky did not deny, but deployed, afterwards. There, it is argued that Psychology had to be *materialistic* (scrutinizing human behavior as a series of movements and reactions with all properties of a material, social being), its method had to be *objective* (based upon verifiable sources) and *dialectic* (connecting social behavior with other processes within the organism, subjected to natural laws in general). In spite of the dramatic differences between the topics addressed within “Educational Psychology” and another work of the 1920s, the “Psychology of Art”, Vygotsky claims these principles in both books.

In addition to Marx and Plekhanov, it is worthwhile mentioning that Vygotsky certainly knew Spinoza in middle 1920s. Some associates reported Spinoza as the Vygotsky’s favorite philosopher (see Leontiev, 1991; Joravsky, 1989). It is true that Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, also started to develop a Marxist tradition sympathetic to Spinoza (Kline, 1952) to be continued by Deborin¹³.

despite Vygotskian intentions of performing a critical appropriation of Spinoza, Vygotsky’s scarce remarks on the philosopher embrace ethical and epistemological questions of great importance to foundation of a new materialist psychology. Questions like: what is the human nature? Is it possible to figure out an alternative

¹³ Engels, Plekhanov and Deborin would have mediated Vygotsky’s attachment to Spinoza. On the other hand, Morfino (2008) assures that Hegel would have mediated Engels’s studies of Spinoza. The answer addressed by Engels to Plekhanov (1976) on the unity of *thought* and *extent* as two attributes of the same substance was close to the German materialism in the 19th Century (Morfino, 2008). Therefore, Vygotsky’s crossroad between Hegel and Spinoza is similar to Engels’s thought. Toassa (2014) claims that in “The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology” (1991b), similarly to Spinoza (2008), the Belorussian overlaps nature and reality.

model for it? How to change it? Spinoza certainly could help in the development of knowledge and mastering our own passions. To my view, these concerns are absent in Deborin's philosophy, yet it can not be confirmed without analyzing more of the latter's work – which envelops at least three articles on Spinoza (Toassa, 2014).

Plekhanov's thinking, as Allen (1969) says: “was so intent upon establishing Marxism as a philosophy – as against those who saw it only as history, economics and politics – that he emphasized the continuity of materialist thought without a full critical evaluation of materialism before Marx” (p.13). This idea certainly applies to analysis of Feuerbach and Spinoza by Plekhanov (1969), book embedded by Vygotsky (1991) in crucial reasoning about matter and consciousness, mind and body.

Vygotsky's “Psychology of Art” (at least partially composed in Gomel's period, between 1917-1924, see Veresov, 1999) starts in on Spinoza:

No one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body... But, it will be urged, it is impossible that solely from the laws of nature considered as extended substance, we should be able to deduce the causes of buildings, pictures, and things of that kind which are produced only by human art; nor would the human body, unless it were determined and led by the mind, be capable of building a single temple. However, I have just pointed out that they do not know the limits of the body's powers, or say what can be concluded from a consideration of its sole nature. (Spinoza, cited by Veresov, 1999, p.90)

The epigraph from Spinoza displays the centrality of Vygotsky's reflections on the body¹⁴. However, Vygotsky displays enduring concerns regarding how emotions have a peripheral as well as central form of expression. The reaction, as a psychophysical concept, also appears as object of his “Psychology of Art”¹⁵.

This “reactological” Vygotsky is concerned with the *aesthetic reaction* as subject matter of “Psychology of Art”. An interesting idea was that even feelings (as perceived emotions/affections), from a subjective standpoint, are part of the reality. He claims the “law of reality of feelings”, that, to my view, overlaps with Spinozist notion that mind and body (correspondingly, determinate modes of thought and extension) are real as part of Nature *equal to Unique Substance*¹⁶. This is the core idea of Spinoza's Monism. In the words of Vygotsky, it is set the paradox of “reality of experience” against the autonomous reality that is independent from the consciousness that experiences the surrounding world:

We can illustrate this by the following example: If at night we mistake an overcoat hanging in our room for a person, our error is obvious, the experience is false and devoid of real content. But the feeling of fear experienced at the instant the coat was sighted is very real indeed. This means that, in essence, all our fantastic experiences take place on a completely real emotional basis. (Vygotsky, 1971, Chapter 9)

Final Considerations

¹⁴ Yet, in the book there is an eclectic (albeit transient) dive into reflections about mental/body energy that are implicit in Aristotle's notion of *catharsis* (as a medical “purge” of negative feelings), as well as other authors who worked in a sphere of nervous activity – case of Orchansky and Sherrington.

¹⁵ The impulsive dimension of emotions, its condition of potency, tendency to action (the main sense of *conatus*) is coupled by Vygotsky's sympathy by the Spinozist concept of *affections* as transitions of body's potency and its idea (see Toassa, 2009). The sense of word *energy*, (энергия – *eniérguia*), as Vygotsky (2001) conveys, is similar to the *conatus*, albeit trespassed by such researches on higher nervous activity as Orchansky. The art has a deep biological power, converting our passions into actions – it is a “social technique”, which helps individuals to rule themselves and to forge the new man as the ultimate goal of a socialist society.

¹⁶ Yet, one ought to acknowledge: there is no direct reference to Spinoza in this particular reasoning.

It is remarkable that, dealing with the object of Psychology in Vygotsky's oeuvre, his commentators tend to stress his ideas about consciousness as a relation between the individual and the external environment, that is also the most traditional Marxist perspective on consciousness, see Plekhanov, 1969; Engels, 1979; Lenin, 1975). The research in cognitive functioning rather than psychology of art prevails in those comments (see Joravsky, 1989), and Vygotsky's readers tend to overlook his philosophical reasoning on reality and nature, meaning his *ontological* perspective. The cognitivist intellectualism is probably stronger than Vygotsky's one – he strived for a Marxist rationalism, not for a Cognitivist perspective as his Western interpreters. He never disregarded the connections between mind and body (the “psychophysical problem”) as crucial part of a materialist psychology. Therefore, the aim to develop a “Psychology of Art” epistemologically objective and still broad enough in order to admit and analyze the reality of feelings in a Marxist worldview was nurtured by L.Vygotsky at least from 1925 to 1933 (see Vygotsky, 1999a).

In the “Educational Psychology” and “Psychology of Art”, the author does not discuss more extensively the relation between matter and consciousness. It is worthwhile saying that the activity as an ontological condition to genesis of society is not systematically approached in both works. However, it plays an essential role in his views on science as a historical-natural process, as I must argue in the next part. The Marxist sources and ideas of the HMCP (his most comprehensive manuscript towards re-shaping the Psychology within other sciences and the Marxism) are considerably different from analyzed above work.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Thomas Teo and Mikhail Munipov for reading earlier drafts of these papers, as well as the Editor, Boris Meshcheryakov, for suggestions and acceptance of this article.

Funding

This research received grant for postdoctoral studies from CAPES (Coordenação para o Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Ensino Superior), Ministry of Education, Brazil.

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Received: 04.05.2015

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