

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

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In this work divided in two papers, I claim that Vygotsky created his own psychological Marxist Materialism, rather than applied an “universal” Dialectical Materialism to Psychology. One important theoretical consequence of this fact is necessity to avoid the eclecticism of blending his views with any others “materialists” (dialectical or not). Therefore, both papers stress similarities and differences between his work and that of authors like Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, Spinoza, and others. After exposing, in the first part, the scientific and philosophical background in which Vygotsky deployed his philosophical concerns in early psychological works, this second part focuses Chapters 8 to 15 of the “Historical Meaning of Crisis in Psychology” (HMCP, 1927). There, the dialectics of scientific psychology is explained as a monistic, historical-natural process, in which the author regards consciousness (immediate experience) as an objective subject matter to his science. Vygotsky’s original, yet ambivalent, interpretation of Lenin’s reasoning on objectivity was crucial for creating a new approach. Furthermore, I stress Vygotsky’s arguments on differences between subjectivity (the alleged “epistemological problem”) and psyche/consciousness (considered as “ontological subject”). Ultimately, I claim that, to Vygotsky, consciousness is not a reflection/copy of reality or passive transmission apparatus but it is a subject matter endowed with its own existence, as a relation between two other objective processes.

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

Vygotsky and the Psychological Materialism in the HMCP

Comparing the edition of the HMCP (first published 1982 and merely reprinted thereafter) with the manuscript placed at the Vygotsky’s Family Archives, Zavershneva (2012) found, unfortunately, so many problems, which we are bound to consider any analysis of the references provided by Vygotsky as provisional to the publishing of a new edition. She says, “Even a casual reader will easily detect obvious absurdities that could not have been in the original: references to works by Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Ivan Pavlov, and other authors that were not published until the second half of the twentieth century” (p.43), as well as other careless errors (exchange of words, removal of quotation marks, different paragraphing). Vygotsky never prepared the work for publishing, and, as B.G. Meshcheryakov (cited Zavershneva, 2012) notices, it was composed in the style of personal notes². The manuscript on the psychological crisis can be assorted as a “semi-private” writing

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² However, Vygotsky’s book was unfinished for publishing, Zavershneva (id.) reports, from an Akhutina’s research in Luria’s family archive, a symposium of Vygotsky’s inner circle devoted to the topic of the crisis in psychology in February 1927, and the same date took from Vygotsky’s 1933 personal autobiography. Facing the uncertainty about the exact year on which it was finished, I follow the most likely, 1927.

(see Joravsky, 1989, p. 265; Yasnitsky, 2009, p. 25), which freed the book from strict ideological control.

Zavershneva (2012) realized a number of corrections done with a ballpoint pen, certainly not wrote by Vygotsky, which crossed out the names of Leon Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, and Karl Radek. Other references (to Dumas, Lalande and Lewin) were inaccurate or suppressed. At least one reference to A. Deborin, who was a Plekhanov's pupil and the most influential supporter of Spinoza within a Marxist *mirovozzvorenie* (worldview), was removed by the editors of the Collected Works in Russian.

Vygotsky argues that, paraphrasing Spinoza's "Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect" (Spinoza, 2002), the Psychology is ill and needs urgent medication. However, my interpretation is that such a medication should be produced by the body itself, meaning an evolution of dialectics of Psychology as an immanent evolution of general [scientific] theory based upon empirical discoveries, interpreted in certain frameworks. The author's position is far from rare one in the 1920s. One of the most disputed problems between dialectical and mechanistic philosophers was whether dialectical materialism should follow the natural sciences, or evolve with their findings, or guide them. The most critical field was Physics, in which the notion of matter had undergone major changes since Newtonian Mechanics – a source to Marx and Engels's Materialism³.

Hence, the historical task of creating a new psychology was paradoxical to Vygotsky: he had to start from internal analysis of an empirical science already in progress, which was interpreted by Party authorities as a natural science, close to physiology. At the same time, Vygotsky endured to develop his project on dialectical materialism (which undergone a problematic state of blending philosophical and political disputes, see Kremontsov, 1997; 2006; Todes & Kremontsov, 2010), which did not yet take the Psychology systematically as a subject, in its complex ontological and epistemological challenges. Thus, the author toils for a new materialist science by adopting a realistic, objective perspective: materialistic in gnoseology (assuming the identity between *gnoseology* and *epistemology* – *gnoseologicheskoi i ontologicheskoi problem*, see Vygotsky, 1982) and dialectical in logic.

Vygotsky's interpretation of dialectics as an epistemological source is crucial, yet difficult to grasp even to people familiar with Soviet Psychology. After portraying its basic problems of research, HMCP (Vygotski, 1991a, p. 290) assumes that general psychology is dialectics of psychology – at the same time, the dialectics of nature and of man as subject of Psychology. The materialist dialectics is understood as a general analysis of the development of partial truths; as a concrete, immanent logic of a true science, which should not receive another name – dialectical logic and materialist history are coupled in a more general science, a "second-layer" in Yasnitsky's view (a general [scientific] theory, see Yasnitsky, 2009).

As Veresov (1999, p. 183) realizes, to Vygotsky, no philosophical system, Marxism included, could substitute the methodology in Psychology. Vygotsky analyzes the stream of ideas within the Psychology as a first step, a step to understanding partial truths towards evolution of critical work. Therefore, in spite of Engels's sway upon Vygotsky, it is fair to say that the three basic laws of dialectics⁴ are not at the core of the HMCP as the wildcard scheme which prevailed after Stalin's Great Break (period between 1929-1932). In fact, Vygotsky does not even mention these laws as such. In a fully blossomed manner, not so clear in his

³ Albeit there was not homogeneity, Joravsky (1961) identifies among the mechanists – mostly natural scientists which embraced the Communism – the tendency to reviewing, more than reproducing, Marx & Engels ideas.

⁴ To Hunt (2009, p.284), 1. Transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; 2. Interpenetration of opposites (two poles of antithesis, like positive and negative, are just as inseparable from each other as they are opposed, and they mutually penetrate each other); 3. Negation of negation, in which internal contradictions give rise to another system, an opposite.

earlier works, the dialectics is in itself the reproduction of a *movement* in reality, that of scientific development in psychology.

In the Chapter 9, Vygotsky establishes two theses, roughly speaking: 1. Any scientific-natural concept – even a mathematical one – envelops a grain of the concrete truth⁵; 2. Any isolated scientific-natural fact, empiric and immature, contains an abstraction, meaning, any word is a theory already. His former holistic and naturalistic ideas find expression in this Potiebnyá's idea, also repeated seven years later in “Thought and Language” (Vygotsky, 2001): as the Sun in a drop of water, the word reflects processes and phenomena from social life. In the HMCP, “We have seen everywhere that the word, like the sun in a drop of water, fully reflects the processes and tendencies in the development of a science” (Vygotsky, 1987, Chapter 9).

The Part 4 of the HMCP mentions Engels and his notion that, as to dialectical logic, methodology of science is *reflection* (отражение – *otrajenie* – in the Marxist sense of social *reproduction*, not being a literal, carbon copy, of reality) of methodology of reality: it is also developed in struggle, crisis and contradictions. At this point, one can also establish a parallel with the Spinozist assumption that order and connection of ideas and things are the same (see Spinoza, 2008, p. 87; similarly in Vygotski, 1991b, p. 87). Differences of language among Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov and Spinoza, four Vygotsky's sources for addressing the problem of consciousness, can explain some differences in the sense the word “reflection” in the HMCP. While at the abovementioned point Vygotsky speaks about *reflection* in a positive context, he criticizes, afterwards, the assumption that consciousness is *reflection* (as I argue further in this paper).

It is fair to say that many monist/materialist authors converge within Vygotsky's assumptions on the unity (theoretical and methodological) between idea [*thought*] and matter. One of them is Plekhanov, to whom the thoughts *correspond* to things-in-themselves, instead of *reflecting* them (as Lenin stated, see Joravsky, 1961, p.13 e Lenin, 1982)⁶.

Such idea, first presented in the previous reasoning on the materialist dialectic of man as subject of psychology, returns at Part 9, when, commenting Höffding, Vygotsky criticizes the habit of split spiritual and material as two series of totally divided development (1991a, p. 336). To Vygotsky, Spinoza was far from an agreement with that habit. Spinoza was not a paralellist thinker. Seven years later, Vygotsky (1999) assumes Spinoza's materialism against a psychology of “pure consciousness”. The Soviet psychologist recommends Spinozist contributions to surpassing dualism in research about higher mental activities departing from body-mind relations, a crucial issue for a future theory on emotions. Once that Vygotsky's perspective on Spinoza was quite similar to Deborin's (Тоасса, 2014), it is mandatory to assume that this philosopher was a legitimate source for the Vygotsky's materialist ideas.

both Deborinits and orthodox Marxists have insisted that the line of demarcation lies rather in the solution of the ontological problem – the relation of matter to consciousness. Materialism, they point out, makes matter primary and basic, whereas idealism gives priority to mind and consciousness. And by this test, Spinoza was a materialist. (Kline, 1952, p.26)

From the HMCP onwards, Vygotsky's answer to the classical epistemological question, “Is Psychology a natural or human science?”, would be to pose a new challenge, that of dissolving the schism between natural and human sciences as the Western tradition of

⁵ He says that Engels follows Hegel, to whom “The nothing of anything is a determinate nothing” (Vygotski, 1991a, p.280)

⁶ However, to Joravsky (1961, p.19), neither of them took pain to use only his favored term, and neither developed a full epistemology which could be clearly opposed to the other's. This indistinctness is similar in Vygotsky's reasoning about “reflection”.

two cultures had done (human X natural sciences, see Goertzen, 2008). As I explain further, within the HMCP, everything which exists is natural and is entitled to be subject of natural sciences – only Mathematics should flow into abstractions⁷.

In a Marxist style, as discussed at the beginning of this paper, he chose a monist/materialist approach of history. It is interesting to observe Vygotsky's (1991a, p.387) remark on how Marx had researched the development of economic formations as a *historical-natural process*. This idea is also clear in the fourth chapter of HMCP, in that Vygotsky's perception of the interpretation of science as the result of work – confrontation between man and nature. In a Plekhanov's statement, "Precisely because the natural properties of mental phenomena at a certain level of knowledge are a purely historical category [...] they can be considered as the cause or one of the causes of the historical development of the science" (Vygotsky, 1987, Chapter 4). After all, the science was a type of work, a material confrontation that should be analyzed as dialectics of Psychology, part of a changing society – an aspect that places Vygotsky into the tradition of critical psychologies (see Teo, 2009; 2006).

Hence, "materialism" and "dialectics" are concepts embedded in a more complete framework than it was first presented in the "Educational Psychology" or "Psychology of Art" (see Toassa, 2015). In the HMCP, if the core focus of this materialism is an analysis of scientific activity as a type of movement, the materialist dialectics of the object of Psychology (Reactions? Consciousness? Mind?) should be realized as a process of development of the Psychology itself. One could say that the dialectical materialism was a worldview to understand it, to change human relations, not as a series of normative prescriptions. In a bold remark – even to his time – Vygotsky says, when facing the classics of Marxism, "the thought is constricted by an authority principle; one does not study methods, but dogmas" (1991a, p.367).

One theoretical reason for Vygotsky's continuous shifts regarding the object of Psychology is due to his struggle with basic philosophical tasks to Psychology, particularly, against its dualism. As Zavershneva states, after investigating unpublished works written by Vygotsky in 1926-1927, *personality* is claimed as the object of Psychology⁸.

As investigation of the notebook revealed, Vygotsky was initially guided by a broader theoretical context and was planning to turn to the study of consciousness. In 1927 these plans were adjusted in favor of studying higher mental functions (HMF). The note "Toward a Definition of the Object of Psychology" reflects an intermediate stage in moving toward the idea of the cultural development of the mind and the formation of HMF and is valuable in that it contains direct references to HMCP (Zavershneva, 2012, p.48).

The note "Toward a Definition of the Object of Psychology" displays an intermediary stage, criticizing two previous candidates to objects of Psychology: the higher functions, as well as personality, placing the idea of a "highly organized life," at the core of Psychology. To Zavershneva's opinion, it was more a methodological step backward (let us say, to the old approach tied with life reactions), than a movement forward to historical-cultural approach.

To my view, between 1927 and 1934, one can identify the core of his search for a subject matter as the forms of psychological Being that were to be regarded as highly organized matter, specifically human, leading to the emergence of historical-cultural theory.

⁷ One can also remark the similarity between this idea and Spinoza's initial assumption for the Deborin, "nature is, it exists. Nature is primary, existing before all philosophizing" (Kline, 1952, p.27).

⁸ Zavershneva (2012) studied the HMCP manuscript; the famous notebook from Zakhar'ino's hospital that started HMCP's reflection; the unpublished text "Toward a Definition of the Object of Psychology", and a note named "They Ask and They Argue".

In a 1930's paper, "The socialist alteration of man", he discusses the disfigurement of human psychological development in terms of a *personality* born in a *person* that

In the pursuit of cheap labour and due to the extreme simplification of the separate functions which the workers have to carry out, large scale recruitment of children becomes possible and this results in a retarded, or a wholly one-sided and distorted development occurring at the most impressionable age when the personality of the person is being formed. (Vygotsky, 1994)⁹

To my recollection, many of the potential objects identified by Zavershneva in the manuscripts are presented in historical-cultural works (see "personality", "higher mental functions", "consciousness"), and also "person" (*tcheloviek*) receives conjectures in a sketch from 1929 (see Vigotski, 2000) and afterwards.

Joravsky (1989) reports that, in the Soviet as in the pre-revolutionary period, "nearly all of Russia's professional psychologists took it for granted that their discipline must analyze consciousness, though they disagreed on the proper way to do that" (p.259). Veresov (1999) assumes that consciousness is the subject matter of Psychology in HMCP. However, such a word is entangled in a complex web of epistemological concerns – Vygotsky has developed his own perspective about the relation between consciousness and matter in a Marxist worldview. Understanding consciousness and its participation in reality according to a monist/materialist ontology as well as gnoseology is at the summit of the book (Chapters 8 to 15). Vygotsky uses interchangeably the terms *immediate experience*, *consciousness* and *mind*, discussing metaphors then used to define it. Is consciousness a copy of reality; an instrument of selection; a radio set that broadcasts and receives a narrow range of electromagnetic radiation? What is true knowledge? What is individual/shared consciousness? How can consciousness to know itself, or other consciousness, or things? Ontological and epistemological questions are put together by Vygotsky, without previous warning to readers – in a non-linear fashion, as Hyman (2012, p.474) realizes.

The "reflexivity" of immediate consciousness

The crisis of scientific psychology demanded a materialist assessment of the immediate experience and its value to knowledge. At this point, it is worthwhile to remember that to the old Wundt's physiological psychology (see Araujo, 2006), immediate experience (*neposredsvennogo opita* in Vygotsky, 1982) – accessed by internal perception (introspection), Wundt's methodological procedure – had been the subject matter of experimental, physiological psychology.

The Part 8 of HMCP (especially pages 314-315 in Spanish edition) deploys an extensive analysis of why technical procedures of investigation ought to be differentiated from methods of knowledge.

Vygotsky (1991a, p. 314) remarks Engels's irony towards any person who tortured himself with regard to the impossibility of sharing the chemical perception of ants, yet people knew better than ants the nature of these same beams which were unable to experience¹⁰.

⁹ Редактор. Ср. с оригинальным текстом: «Особенно жуткую картину уродования психологического развития человека представляет собой детский труд в эту эпоху. Чрезвычайное упрощение отдельных функций, выполняемых рабочими, позволяет в погоне за дешевым трудом вовлекать в производство детские массы, в результате чего происходит задержка и одностороннее уродливое развитие в самом решающем возрасте, когда складывается личность человека» (Выготский, 1930).

¹⁰ I relate this notion with Vygotsky's assumption that consciousness/higher mental functions can be known through their products (more developed in cultural-historical texts, see Vygotsky, 1995), what is implied in his reasoning especially on how geological science worked with incomplete pieces of evidence.

Engels's irony supports a basic Marxist assumption, that is, the anti-empiricist idea that sensations are not a valid source of knowledge by themselves. However, his conception about the scientific task as that of isolating, analyzing, detaching, abstracting traces from sensation towards an insertion of these traces within a wider totality – as a system¹¹ is clear (id., p. 314). As he states, “any mind answers the features of an instrument which selects, isolates traces of phenomena” (1991a, p. 314), in a forecast of his “instrumental” psychology and the higher mental functions as mediated *operations*, that select sensorial information from the body or the environment and act upon it.

Refusing a reduction of the object of psychology to temporary consciousness or a narrow transmission or copy of the immediate environment, a particularly interesting metaphor presents the immediate experience/consciousness/mind as an entity contained between two *porogov* (порогов – thresholds¹²). First, the *senses*, which prevent us from seeing what ants see. Our five senses release frames from the external world (and, presumably, from our own bodies) – we do not have the whole picture, the world is epitomized in extracts¹³. Second threshold, *selection* among this diversity of extracts –

An eye that would see everything, would for this very reason see nothing. A consciousness that was aware of everything would be aware of nothing, and knowledge of the self, were it aware of everything, would be aware of nothing. Our knowledge (*opit* – G.T.) is confined between two thresholds, we see but a tiny part of the world. Our senses give us the world in the excerpts, extracts that are important for us. And in between the thresholds it is again not the whole variety of changes which is registered, and new thresholds exist. Consciousness follows nature in a saltatory fashion as it were, with blanks and gaps. The mind selects the stable points of reality amidst the universal movement. It provides islands of safety in the Heraclitean stream. It is an organ of selection, a sieve filtering the world and changing it so that it becomes possible to act. In this resides its positive role – not in reflection (the non-mental reflects as well; the thermometer is more precise than sensation), but in the fact that it does not always reflect correctly, i.e., subjectively distorts reality to the advantage of the organism. (Vygotsky, 1987, Chapter 8)¹⁴

¹¹ The idea of consciousness as a system, a whole, is recurrent in Vygotsky's oeuvre, especially on the 1930s (see Тоасса, 2006).

¹² Into Spanish, the translation is “umbrales”, but I believe Vygotsky refers to physiological thresholds of sensation (for example, human hearing thresholds goes from 20 up to 20.000 Hz, see Raff & Levitzky, 2012, p. 152).

¹³ In his discussions within Vygotsky Circle (1927-1931, see Yasnitsky, 2009, p. 53), Eisenstein deployed his theory of film as perception of many frames in abridged units of sense (Eisenstein, 2002), the last being as well a Vygotsky's cultural-historical concept.

¹⁴ *Редактор*. Для лучшего понимания дадим более объемную цитату из оригинала: «Собственная же проблема психологии заключена тоже в ограниченности нашего непосредственного опыта, потому что вся психика построена по типу инструмента, который выбирает, изолирует отдельные черты явлений; глаз, который видел бы все, именно поэтому не видел бы ничего; сознание, которое сознавало бы все, ничего бы не сознавало, и самосознание, если бы сознавало все, не сознавало бы ничего. Наш опыт заключен между двумя порогами, мы видим лишь маленький отрезок мира; наши чувства дают нам мир в выдержках, извлечениях, важных для нас. Внутри порогов они опять отмечают не все многообразие применений, а переводят их опять через новые пороги. Сознание как бы прыжками следует за природой, с пропусками, пробелами. Психика выбирает устойчивые точки действительности среди всеобщего движения. Она есть островки безопасности в гераклитовом потоке. Она есть орган отбора, решето, процеживающее мир и изменяющее его так, чтобы можно было действовать. В этом ее положительная роль – не в отражении (отражает и непсихическое; термометр точнее, чем ощущение), а в том, чтобы не всегда верно отражать, т.е. субъективно искажать действительность в пользу организма» (Выготский, т. 1, с. 347).

In this awesome monist reasoning, one can see his enduring concern with a comprehension of consciousness embodied in organism, previously expressed in Vygotsky (1971;2003). It would be hard to perform a stalinist (a Marxist-Leninist) interpretation of this particular citation, once that consciousness does not appear as a mere reflection of reality.

Vygotsky follows, claiming that consciousness' action is its positive role, beyond its role as a reflection (*otrajenie* – copy, at this point of the HMCP meaning the exact reproduction of a certain property of matter). He assumes that the “thermometer is more accurate than sensation” (1991a, p. 315); therefore, reflection is not a sole property of mind. At the same time, the task for Psychology is to explain why it is worth to seek for what can not be reached by our sensations¹⁵. The knowledge (as an epistemological process done by the subject of knowledge) has an ontological relation with our psychological nature, the nature of consciousness placed between sensations and awareness. Therefore, there is a full analogy between the selection of the eye and that of the instrument – enriched by Vygotsky's remarks on spirit and matter, subjectivity and objectivity, as I analyze from now on.

A New Perspective on Subjectivity and Psyche (or Spirit)

The second last part of HMCP is heavily concentrated on dualism¹⁶, one of the most analyzed aspects of the book (see Rocha Lordelo & Tenório, 2010; Leontiev, 1991; Rocha Lordelo, 2011; Caparrós, 1991; Veresov, 1999; van der Veer & Valsiner, 2001; Hyman, 2012; Romand, 2010). One must acknowledge that Vygotsky was not the first thinker to work at it: Dualism was a significant subject of discussion in psychology since 1899, when Willy published the first study on crisis in psychological science (see Caparrós, 1991). To my view, Vygotsky's remarks on dualism and the Plekhanov's oeuvre (having in mind the readings of IU.V Frankfurt on the latter) are particularly important.

Vygotsky criticizes how Frankfurt took *mind* as special quality or property of matter; *mind* as abstract and parallel to movement in the physical world (parallelism is criticized in many points of the text). Thereafter, he ascribes to Frankfurt (1926) a dualist reading of ontology as well as methodology¹⁷. Leaning against such a parallelism, Frankfurt would have supported a geometrical method of Psychology, similar to Dilthey's descriptive psychology. However, it is fair to say: Vygotsky recognizes that Plekhanov (1969) had dualistically denied the sway of mind upon the physical world.

The second last part of the HMCP is conclusive for Vygotsky's interpretation regarding a materialist Psychology, which, to my perception, is the most important to confirm the claim that he developed a creative Marxism (see Shuare, 1990; Joravsky, 1989; van der Veer & Valsiner, 2001). Paraphrasing his criticism towards an acquaintance of him, an erudite psychologist who – rather fragmentally – defined himself as Social Democrat, Darwinist and Copernican (Vygotsky, 1991a, p.404), one has to acknowledge that our man was not Engelsian, Plekhanovist, Leninist or Spinozist. Vygotsky's interpretation about all of these monist/materialist sources appear as background to developing his Marxist thought within psychology, that would not suffer from dogmatic or eclectic borrowings from those classics.

¹⁵ This idea is claimed also in “Concrete Human Psychology” (Vygotsky, 2000) and “Thought and Language” (Vygotsky, 2001).

¹⁶ Mistakes are in HMCP's Russian edition as well as in Spanish: in Russian, the number ascribed for the second last part is 14. The following is numbered 16. In Spanish, the second last is 13, jumping thereafter to 15.

¹⁷ Three years later, has emerged an important idea in Vygotsky (1991a): “the mind should not be considered as a series of special processes which exist somewhere as supplement above and apart from brain processes, but as a subjective expression of these same processes, a special facet, a qualitatively special feature of higher functions of the brain” (p. 100, my translation).

A crucial aspect is his analysis on the topic of dualism starts from the difference between two formulas: *phenomenological/idealist* by Husserl and *materialist*, by Feuerbach (with an addition of Lenin's ideas). It is remarkable to notice that, although Vygotsky figures the salvation of psychology from its crisis depending upon a differentiation of both formulas, yet readers have not valued this particular reasoning. He identifies two similar forms of confusion in the whole field of scientific psychology:

1) Between the epistemological and ontological problem (HMCP, p. 380), once it is customary to identify subjective and psychic, what has led to repeated conclusions that the mind itself could not be objective or even real. Vygotsky denies that anything "unreal" was entitled to be scientifically studied. The identification between mental and physical in the psychological sphere was a Husserlian misconception;

2) Between gnoseological consciousness (like one of terms of the opposition *subject-object*; a gnoseological position: consciousness as the subject who knows) and empirical, psychological consciousness (as, for example, *my individual consciousness*). Vygotsky criticizes perspectives that embraced the immateriality of consciousness under the assumption that it was "Machism", meaning, an idea by Ernst Mach, a hatred character to Bolsheviks since Lenin's criticism (1982). *Psychological consciousness is somehow material and real*, what he explains further, in the same second last part, with the mirror's metaphor, which I shall discuss ahead.

To be a science, Psychology had to take its subject matter among processes really existing in nature. The possibility of psychology as an empirical science was in jeopardy since Kant's idea about a "huge difference between examining factors involved in particular spatial perceptions and examining the implications of the fact that our perceptions are characterized by spatiality" (Danziger, 1994, p. 20). After Kant, Wundt focused on sensations as elements of *immediate experience* eligible for an experimental psychology. It was possible to establish objective connections of cause-and-effect; time and space when studying sensations (Ferreira, 2006). Vygotsky was interested in more complex cultural phenomena, having to move further from this point. Additionally, to understand consciousness as a simple reflection of reality/matter and not as part of reality – as it is conspicuous in some sections of Lenin (1982) – did not help to construct consciousness as a subject matter for a Marxist Psychology.

Kant had thrown Psychology in a permanent identity crisis, making it slips between objects and methodologies that sought "objectivity". Vygotsky sets the formula of Feuerbach against Husserl, that is, the gnoseological formula of psychological materialism: "The difference between thinking and reality has not been removed in psychology. Even within the thought one can distinguish between thinking and thinking about thinking itself" (L. Feuerbach, 1955, p. 216, in Vygotsky, 1991a, p. 379)^{18, 19}.

¹⁸ It is extremely interesting to notice that Semyon Frank, in his "Spinoza's doctrine of attributes" (1912), wrote that "For Spinoza, knowledge of things is not distinguished in principle from knowledge about knowledge" (cited Kline, 1952, p. 31). Vygotsky (1991a) quotes Frank's "The man's soul". His relation to Frank's legacy remains unclear.

¹⁹ *От редактора*. Приведем соответствующий фрагмент из русского издания ИСПК: «Феноменология (описательная психология) исходит из коренного различия между физической природой и психическим бытием. В природе мы различаем явления в бытии. «В психической сфере нет никакого различия между явлением и бытием» (Э. Гуссерль, 1911, с. 25). Если природа есть бытие, которое проявляется в явлениях, то этого совершенно нельзя утверждать относительно психического бытия. Здесь явление и бытие совпадают друг с другом. Трудно дать более четкую формулу психологического идеализма. А вот гносеологическая формула психологического материализма: «Разница между мышлением и бытием в психологии не уничтожена. Даже относительно мышления ты можешь различать между мышлением мышления и мышлением самим по себе» (Л. Фейербах, 1955, с. 216). *В этих двух формулах сущность всего спора»* (Выготский, т. 1, с. 409).

Hence, to my view, Vygotsky put Feuerbach's formula together with the classical Lenin realist principle to a materialist gnoseology: the concept of matter does not mean nothing more than what exists independently from human consciousness (as immediate experience) and it is reflected by it (1991a, p. 382).

Exposing an unorthodox psychological interpretation of Lenin (1982), overlooking sections in that matter and reality overlapped, Vygotsky explains how one's own immediate experience can be independent of the consciousness that knows it. As Plekhanov had stated, consciousness (as immediate experience) could exist apart from self-consciousness: I can see without perceiving that I see, depending on the Heraclitean flow which streams through my psychological consciousness.²⁰ The Chapter V of Dostoevsky's "The Double" offers a fine example of such phenomenon: in state of complete self-oblivion, Mr. Golyádkin leaves Olsufi Ivánovitch's house, overwhelmed by humiliation. Careless about the windy, foggy, cold night of November in Saint Petersburg, "It was by miracle that he kept the capacity of running at this point, miracle in that he did not allow himself to believe" (Dostoiévski, 2011, p.63).

Vygotsky's Marxist "naturalism" resembles Spinozist monism, in which reality, nature and substance are the same. Enduring work of the famous Soviet psychologist to include psychological phenomena in nature, and to place the Psychology in a Marxist worldview is connected to his concern about applying the term "natural sciences" not only to disciplines whose focus were in studies of sensitive organic and inorganic nature, but the whole reality. He declared himself – perhaps in a vague resonance of Hegel's statement that "the real is rational, the rational is real" (Hegel, 2001, p. 18) – certain that "extending [the word – G.T.] 'natural' to all that exists in reality is completely rational" (p. 387). Is this idea an answer to Lenin's (1972) passionate calling towards a reinterpretation of Hegelian Dialectics to natural sciences and materialism?

In such terms, it was possible to study "objectively" the consciousness without making distinctions between matter and spirit. Vygotsky's philosophical reasoning, done *from* the psychology, flows into the assumption that everything is real (an idea implied in his old "law of reality of feelings"); therefore, natural. At this point, it is legitimate to identify a true evolution within his materialism: HMCP displays an exquisite reasoning regarding such a complex subject. To my view, the consciousness as a false, "unreal" phenomenon had to be explained as a misunderstanding, a non-coincidence, the relation between two real processes; the subjective, as effect of two objective processes, whose method of knowledge remained, therefore, indirect, subjective, relying upon a process of internal reconstruction of relations noticeable only in part.

Vygotsky's example about an object and its reflection is perfect to understand his reasoning. An object *A* (let us say, a table) that is reflected in a mirror *X* has an image *a*. *A* is real, but *a* is not real in the way *A* is; it is real in a different way: *a* is unreal just as the table that is reflected in the mirror is unreal. Only *A* and *X* are material, because they exist

²⁰ Редактор. Для лучшего понимания ср. у Л.С. Выготского в ИСПК: «Стоит только *применить* гносеологическую формулу материализма, данную В.И. Лениным (сходная у Г.В. Плеханова), к психологическому субъекту – объекту, чтобы увидеть, в чем дело: «...единственное «свойство» материи, с признанием которого связан философский материализм, есть свойство *быть объективной реальностью*, существовать вне нашего сознания» (В.И. Ленин. Полн. собр. соч., т. 18, с. 275). «...Понятие материи... не означает гносеологически *ничего иного*, кроме как: объективная реальность, существующая независимо от человеческого сознания и отображаемая им» (там же, с. 276). В другом месте В. И. Ленин говорит, что это» в сущности, принцип *реализма*, но он избегает этого слова, потому что оно захватано непоследовательными мыслителями.

Итак, *как будто* эта формула говорит против нашей точки зрения: сознание не может не существовать вне нашего сознания. Но, как верно определил Плеханов, самосознание есть сознание сознания. И сознание *может* существовать без-самосознания: в этом убеждает нас бессознательное, относительно бессознательное. Я могу видеть, не зная, что вижу» (т. 1, с. 413).

regardless of *a*. The “second table” does not really exist, but the table, mirror and the light that bounces off the mirror to create the reflection. *a* is not *A*, nor even the light or *X*, yet the image, which results from the relation between these three elements, has an existence – this is his metaphor of consciousness. Connecting an ontological idea with an epistemological one, Vygotsky says this is “the cornerstone of materialist thesis that consciousness and brain are the product and part of nature and reflect the rest of nature” (1991a, p. 386).²¹

Vygotsky plays with this example to illustrate Lenin’s ideas. He argues that consciousness does not exist independently but only because of two objective processes: electromagnetic radiation that travels from the object to our eyes (visible light) and neural processes in the brain. As it is written in his historical-cultural texts (see Vygotski, 1995; 1991b; 1996a), and I assumed in a previously (Тоасса, 2006), in a gnoseological sense, consciousness is a relation of “*comprehension* or *knowledge*, active regarding social environment and not merely *perception*, or even *thought*, as it is claimed by other psychologies” (p. 73). It is as process of making sense embedded in cultural means. As I explained in the same paper, there is a second important sense: consciousness as a psychological system in relation with environment and the individual himself, a sort of apparatus which is deployed by society and deploys it as well, bringing together new and old functional systems. However, this sense is not fully developed in the HMCP.

The HMCP ontological and epistemological assumptions display conclusions for a Marxist analytical method of psychology (Vygotsky, 1991a, p. 361; 378 ss), which could isolate the common/general in the individual by means of a mental abstraction²². A Marxist psychological analysis had to find units of analysis – as *cell* to microanatomy –, which bore the properties of totality; a true understanding on correspondence matter-spirit, as he had

²¹ *От редактора.* Для лучшего понимания автора приведем два фрагмента из русского издания ИСПК: «Сравним сознание как это часто делают, с зеркальным отражением. Пусть предмет *A* отражен в зеркале, как *a*. Конечно, было бы ложно сказать, что *a* так же реально, как *A*, но оно *иначе реально* само по себе. Стол и его отражение в зеркале не одинаково реальны, а по-разному. Отражение как отражение, как образ стола, как второй стол в зеркале нереально, это призрак. Но отражение стола как преломление световых лучей в плоскости зеркала – разве не столь же материальный и реальный предмет, как стол? Было бы чудом все иное. Тогда мы сказали бы: существуют вещи (стол) и их призраки (отражение). Но существуют *только* вещи – (стол) и отражение света от плоскости, а призраки суть *кажущиеся* отношения между вещами. Поэтому никакая наука о зеркальных призраках невозможна. Но это не значит, что мы не сумеем никогда объяснить отражение, призрак: если мы будем знать *вещь* и *законы отражения света*, мы всегда объясним, предскажем, по своей воле вызовем, изменим призрак. Это и делают люди, владеющие зеркалами: они изучают не зеркальные отражения, а движение световых лучей и объясняют отражение. Невозможна наука о зеркальных призраках, но учение о свете и об отбрасываемых и отражающих его вещах вполне объясняет «призраки».

То же и в психологии: субъективное само по себе как призрак должно быть понято как следствие, как результат, как жареный голубь – *двух* объективных процессов. Загадка психики решится, как загадка зеркала, не путем изучения призраков, а путем изучения двух рядов объективных процессов, из взаимодействия которых возникают призраки как кажущиеся отражения *одного в другом*. Само по себе кажущееся не существует» (Выготский, т. 1, с. 415-416).

«И *A* и *X* суть реальные процессы, а *a* есть возникающий из них, кажущийся т.е. нереальный, *результат*. Отражение не существует, но и стол и свет одинаково существуют. Отражение же стола не совпадает с реальными процессами света в зеркале, как и с самим столом.

Не говоря о том, что иначе мы должны были бы допустить существование в мире и вещей, и призраков, вспомним, что ведь само зеркало есть *часть той же природы, что и вещь вне зеркала*, и подчинено всем ее законам. Ведь краеугольным камнем материализма является положение о том, что сознание и мозг есть продукт, часть природы, отражающая остальную природу. И значит, объективное существование *X* и *A* независимо от *a* есть догма материалистической психологии» (Выготский, т. 1, с. 416-417)

²² Vygotsky brings Marx & Engels and their examples of microanatomy and steam engine for the description of the reverse method, very present in the commentary on "Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology" and also in other Vygotsky's books (see Vygotski, 1991a; 2001).

previously considered to be the aesthetic reaction within the "Psychology of Art". In a development of his Monist reflection on unity Nature-History, Vygotsky attributes to experimentation the role of changing Nature to carrying out conditions for a proper observation: "Pavlov's experiment is the best example: to dog, it is a *natural* experiment – it is fed, etc. – however, to scientist, it is the summit of unnaturalness" (id, p. 376, my translation).

Final considerations

These two papers, unfortunately, presented only initial studies on a complex array of subjects. It could not be different: Vygotsky (1991a) himself remarked how hard it was being a Materialist in Psychology. Hence, the present articles are far from explore the theoretical and political consequences of a Vygotskian Materialism as a specific perspective not only in Psychology, but Marxism itself, rather than mixing his views with anyone who claims to be a "dialectical materialist".

Dialectical materialism is not only a passive method to be applied to psychology, as well as to other developing sciences: this usage can only result in a new sort of "red eclecticism" that blurs Vygotsky specific contribution to Marxist thought. This is a strong reason by which I claim an immanent analysis of his oeuvre, an author with major insights on a materialist Psychology departing from theoretical and methodological problems of Psychology itself.

Summarizing, Vygotsky's answers to the main question that I asked at the beginning of these two articles (what would be the meaning of his proposal for a Marxist Psychology in its four basic senses, ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political), rely upon the combination of two assumptions that one can ascertain as:

1. Ontological (consciousness is real and natural as relation between two objective processes, based on a matter/energy interconnectedness between body as well as brain, parts and product of Nature);
2. Epistemological/gnoseological (matter is what exists independently of consciousness and is reflected/reproduced by it, including thought itself as well as processes which take place in the body). Subjective-objective is an epistemological, not an ontological problem, therefore subjectivity would not be a candidate to be the subject matter of psychology.

Both assumptions, constructed within the HMCP, have diverse monist/materialist classical sources within Vygotsky's thought; most of them, Marxists (with the important exceptions of Feuerbach and Spinoza) – however, the HMCP displays differences between some of his ideas and that of the classics in more than one aspect. Vygotsky does not hammer on the ontological primacy of matter over consciousness, a basic feature of Soviet ideology after the Great Break – quite the contrary: he tries to understand consciousness in a material world and according to theoretical and practical challenges for Psychology. Beyond Lenin's (1975) focus, on how consciousness (in a political sense) could be "donated" from Proletarian Party to the people, Vygotsky addressed the consciousness also as immediate experience; relation, change, "Heraclitean flow", embedded in nature.

The relations between Vygotsky and the Russian Marxists are very complex. His readings of Lenin's reflection theory are ambivalent, and one cannot overlook other philosophical sources to his Psychology. To my view, Plekhanov and Deborin influenced Vygotsky's taste for pre-marxist authors, especially Spinoza. If a philosophical perspective may assume that Spinoza and Marx not always go together in epistemological, ethical-political, and ontological terms (see Тоасса, 2009;2014), still one has a challenge to construct

a contemporary interpretation of a Vygotskian Psychology and its implications for social movements worldwide.

In the HMCP, Psychology's methodology for knowledge is indirect, as that of natural sciences. This idea expresses the *continuum* between human and natural sciences, peculiar to Eastern Marxism. Psychological consciousness has an existence in movement being established as a changing system which integrates the world and operates upon it, and not to be constrained inside the individual skin. In a Marxist style, the author interprets consciousness as a practical as well as intellectual system that never can be separated from life in society, life within a specific form of cultural-historical "interconnectedness". These assumptions, embedded in an unique materialist dialectic framework that dialogued with problems of Soviet philosophy of Science during the 1920s, unequivocally helped Vygotsky to structuring many aspects of his methods (as genetic-experimental method) and methodology (as his method of analysis of units).

Truly, as Elhammouni (2002) picks from the HMCP – as well as other Marxist readers of Vygotsky – Vygotsky identified the need for psychology to construct "its own Capital". Truly, he did not fulfill this task. However, the same ought to be said about all the other psychologists who make use of dialectical materialism mentioned by Elhammouni (2002), as Sève and Politzer, including Vygotsky's "pupil", Leontiev. The latter's Activity Theory is based on other relationship with dialectical materialism and a very different historical context for the Soviet Science itself.

My claim for a "Vygotskian Materialism" does not distort that, in spite of Vygotsky's enduring fight against dualism on behalf of psychology as a true "natural" science, he displayed hesitation when facing the problem of its object of study. It is widely known that Marx's Capital focused on material production. But how to move a Marxist psychology forward if we do not agree in such an elementary definition about its object(s)? It is fair to say that this is a problem far from solved, which crosses the four basic senses of Marxism (ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political). The question about which, after all, would be the object of Psychology for the author also demands a research on Vygotskian texts after the HMCP to provide an immanent analysis of the shifts in the construction of his psychology.

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