

The Ontological Status of Subjectivity from a Historical-Cultural and Lukácsian Perspective

Estatuto ontológico da subjetividade em uma perspectiva
histórico-cultural e lukácsiana

Estatuto ontológico de la subjetividad desde una perspectiva
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Guilherme Wagner¹

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the ontological status of subjectivity from a historical-cultural and Lukácsian perspective, articulating the Marxist foundations of Vygotsky, Lukács, and González Rey. It examines the critique of modern and postmodern conceptions that reduced subjectivity to internal or merely discursive phenomena, denying it an autonomous ontological status. Likewise, it argues that, within Soviet psychology, Activity Theory objectified the psyche by privileging activity as its central explanatory category, ultimately preserving the dichotomy between the internal and the external. Lukács, by proposing an ontology of social being, advanced by recognizing the subjective activity in teleological positing, yet remained tied to the theory of reflection. González Rey transcends this limitation by conceiving subjectivity as a symbolic-emotional quality of human processes, socially configured, and historically situated. His theory proposes a configurational logic of subjectivity, composed of subjective senses and subjective configurations that intertwine individual and social dimensions in constant tension and reconstruction. The emergence of the subject occurs when individuals or groups create their own paths of subjectivation, which may or may not promote subjective development. The analysis concludes with an understanding of subjectivity as a constitutive dimension of social being, whose symbolic-emotional production integrates objectivity and subjectivity, overcoming classical dualisms and enabling a dialectical and creative reading of human experience

Keywords: Subjectivity; Ontology; Marxism; Vygotsky; González Rey.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho discute o estatuto ontológico da subjetividade a partir de uma perspectiva histórico-cultural e lukácsiana, articulando os fundamentos marxistas de Vigotski, Lukács e González Rey. Examina-se a crítica às concepções modernas e pós-modernas que reduziram a subjetividade a fenômenos internos ou meramente discursivos, negando-lhe estatuto ontológico próprio. Do mesmo modo, argumenta-se que, no âmbito da psicologia soviética, a Teoria da Atividade

¹ PROFMAT/UFSC; PPGFCET/UTFPR. Brasil. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1346-7980>. E-mail: guilherme.w@ufsc.br.

objetivou o psiquismo ao privilegiar a atividade como categoria explicativa central, preservando, em última instância, a dicotomia entre o interno e o externo. Lukács, ao propor uma ontologia do ser social, avançou ao reconhecer a atividade subjetiva no pôr teleológico, mas permaneceu preso à teoria do reflexo. González Rey supera esse limite ao conceber a subjetividade como qualidade simbólico-emocional dos processos humanos, socialmente configurada e historicamente situada. Sua teoria propõe uma lógica configuracional da subjetividade, composta por sentidos subjetivos e configurações subjetivas, que articulam as dimensões individual e social em permanente tensão e reconstrução. A emergência do sujeito ocorre quando indivíduos ou grupos criam vias próprias de subjetivação, podendo ou não promover desenvolvimento subjetivo. A análise culmina na compreensão da subjetividade como dimensão constitutiva do ser social, cuja produção simbólico-emocional integra objetividade e subjetividade, superando dualismos clássicos e possibilitando uma leitura dialética e criadora da experiência humana.

Palavras-chave: Subjetividade; Ontologia; Marxismo; Vigotski; González Rey.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo discute el estatuto ontológico de la subjetividad desde una perspectiva histórico-cultural y lukácsiana, articulando los fundamentos marxistas de Vigotski, Lukács y González Rey. Se examina la crítica a las concepciones modernas y posmodernas que redujeron la subjetividad a fenómenos internos o meramente discursivos, negándole un estatuto ontológico propio. Asimismo, se argumenta que, en el ámbito de la psicología soviética, la Teoría de la Actividad objetivó el psiquismo al privilegiar la actividad como categoría explicativa central, preservando, en última instancia, la dicotomía entre lo interno y lo externo. Lukács, al proponer una ontología del ser social, avanzó al reconocer la actividad subjetiva en el acto teleológico, pero permaneció vinculado a la teoría del reflejo. González Rey supera este límite al concebir la subjetividad como una cualidad simbólico-emocional de los procesos humanos, socialmente configurada e históricamente situada. Su teoría propone una lógica configuracional de la subjetividad, compuesta por sentidos subjetivos y configuraciones subjetivas, que articulan las dimensiones individual y social en permanente tensión y reconstrucción. La emergencia del sujeto ocurre cuando individuos o grupos crean vías propias de subjetivación, pudiendo o no promover desarrollo subjetivo. El análisis culmina en la comprensión de la subjetividad como dimensión constitutiva del ser social, cuya producción simbólico-emocional integra objetividad y subjetividad, superando dualismos clásicos y posibilitando una lectura dialética y creadora de la experiencia humana.

Palabras clave: Subjetividad; Ontología; Marxismo; Vigotski; González Rey.

1 Initial Considerations

In the historical-categorical analysis of subjectivity, Delari Junior (2013, p. 35) states that it is "more directly related to properly modern discussions [than the subject]", dating from 1874 the first mention of this term in Portuguese as an adaptation of the French *subjectivité*, which would have derived from the German *Subjektivität*. The primary issue of this analysis is that subjectivity emerged in

modernity, especially in the formulations of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, as an expression of the subject's interiority and self-reflection. Interiority came to be conceived as the privileged place for apprehending universal principles of reason and conscience, even though this conception kept subjectivity subordinated to the search for an abstract universality.

For Kant, subjectivity, as that which refers to the subjective, was consolidated as referring to something internal to the subject—intrapsychic. In the literature of the Prussian philosopher, the subjective refers to the self-reflection of the transcendental subject who, endowed with a *priori's*, interprets the world from them. With Descartes, subjectivity follows the same path, articulating itself with a subject of the cogito, as opposed to an empirical and psychological subject affected by the body. In the discourse of modernity, subjectivity imprisoned within the isolated subject, in a kind of Kantian solipsism, conforms to a vision that profoundly influenced Soviet Marxist studies on the term, which assumed every form of assent to subjectivity as a deviation from idealism and subjectivism.

The objective of this article is to highlight the ontological character of subjectivity as exposed by González Rey and to establish a critical dialogue with Lukács's ontology, constituting a category that we consider central: estranged social subjectivities.

The present study is characterized as theoretical bibliographic research of a historical-categorical nature, whose procedure consists of the critical reconstruction of the conceptual development of the category of subjectivity throughout different philosophical and psychological traditions. Historical-categorical analysis is understood as the method that seeks to apprehend a category not in its static definition, but in its movement of constitution and transformation over time, evidencing the historical, theoretical, and ideological determinations that shape it in each context of production. The selection of authors and works analyzed followed a criterion of theoretical relevance and critical continuity: on the one hand, the founding texts of modern and postmodern conceptions of subjectivity (Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, and Freud) were privileged, taken as a counterpoint to materialist perspectives; on the other hand, the central works of the Soviet and Lukácsian Marxist tradition (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Rubinstein, and Lukács) were chosen, as they constitute the core of the ontological debate that the article

intends to reconstruct; and, finally, the work of González Rey was selected as a central reference for representing, in the reading defended here, the critical overcoming of the limits identified in the previous formulations. In addition, commentators and interpreters (Delari Junior, Tertulian, Infranca, Rossato, Mitjáns Martínez, among others) were used to situate and problematize these readings within the contemporary debate. The analysis was conducted through a comparative and dialectical reading of the primary and secondary sources, seeking not the mere chronological juxtaposition of the authors, but the identification of continuities, ruptures, and theoretical insufficiencies that justify the passage from one conception to another, culminating in the proposition of the category of estranged social subjectivities as an original contribution of this work.

Before advancing in the understanding of the ontological status of subjectivity, it is necessary to deepen these different perspectives within modern and postmodern discourses.

2 The problem of Subjectivity in modern and postmodern philosophies

Behaviorist psychology, based on empiricist and positivist postulates, excluded subjectivity from its studies on the individual formation (González Rey, 2016). In empiricism, the subject was seen as passive, a mere reflection of reality, while positivism reduced knowledge to the observation and measurement of objective propositions, resulting in instrumentalist practice (González Rey, 1997). Such instrumentalism generated a radical separation between subject and object, depersonalizing both the researcher and the investigated: the former only applies instruments and the latter only responds, without any real interaction in the process of knowledge production.

These conceptions consolidated behaviorist hegemony, which interpreted the social as a set of external stimuli acting on the individual. Subjectivity was not recognized as an ontologically autonomous category, being interpreted based on the relationships between behavior and environmental contingencies. In this way, behaviorism reduced the subjective phenomenon - understood as private behaviors submitted to the same principles that regulate observable behavior - to a naturalistic and functionalist perspective, denying it any ontological status (González Rey, 2016).

In opposition to this mechanistic and quantitative view, phenomenological approaches emerged, which redirected the focus to the meanings of the lived experience of the subject (González Rey, 1997). For Husserl (1989), reality is accessed through phenomenological reduction, which seeks to understand being in the forms of signification of consciousness. Subjectivity, in this context, is founded on the notion of transcendental subjects. Phenomenology breaks with positivism by denying the isomorphism between essence and fact, questioning the epistemological validity of quantitative research.

With Heidegger (2005), phenomenology takes on a hermeneutic and existential character. Human experience is interpreted from concrete action, and meaning emerges in the course of that action. However, subjectivity remains limited to the field of interpretation, being restricted to intersubjectivity and, therefore, without ontological autonomy.

Poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives have amplified this limitation by rejecting the modern bases of subjectivity. For Foucault, subjectivity is understood as a product of discursive formations and lacks a creative character, being determined by historical and linguistic conditions (González Rey, 1997).

Finally, psychoanalysis, although it broke with behaviorist empiricism, maintained a bioenergetic model of understanding the psyche. For Freud, subjectivity is structured by universal invariants and sexuality as an organizing principle, reducing the social to a mere context of instinctual expression (González Rey, 2016). Thus, even while recognizing the dynamism of the psyche, Freudian psychoanalysis maintains it as an internal and individual entity, devoid of ontological status.

3 From Lukács's perspective to Gonzalez Rey via Vygotsky

Before advancing in the ontological investigation of subjectivity from Lukács, it is essential to understand the historical positions of subjectivity and the psyche from a Marxist perspective. Cultural-historical psychology, proposed by Vygotsky and known in Brazil as historical-cultural, represents one of the greatest contributions of Marxism in the twentieth century to the ontological foundations of subjectivity. Although it is common, especially in Brazilian studies, to consider Soviet psychology as a single line composed of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria, recent

research has questioned this simplified view of the evolution of Soviet psychology (Yasnitsky; Veer, 2015). Among the advances in the cultural-historical perspective is the overcoming of the dichotomy between internal and external, defended by Rubinstein, who saw the social not as something external to the psyche, but as constitutive of it. Rubinstein (1974) proposes the idea of refraction, which maintains a dialectical relationship between activity and consciousness, without establishing an ontological status for subjectivity, but preserving the unity between internal and external, despite refraction being a characteristic of matter itself and not exclusively of the psyche. Vygotsky, in turn, brought an innovative and critical approach to Marxism applied to psychology (Vygotsky, 1999). After his death, his ideas unfolded in three main directions: Activity Theory (Leontiev), research on personality and motivation (Bozhovic), and neuropsychology (Luria) (Gonzalez Rey, 1997).

Leontiev's Activity Theory is based on Vygotsky's concept of internalization and develops from it, a term taken from a French psychiatrist, and according to Gonzalez Rey (1997) from the less original concepts of Vygotsky's work, being even a highly contradictory point in the author's intellectual development. The point is that this concept was used to justify a positivist interpretation of Marxism concerning the materiality of the psyche, which was converted from concrete forms into the external material world, reifying the psyche.

Despite being endowed with an objectivist sense and being a concept of his instrumentalist phase (González Rey, 2011), Vygotsky nevertheless emphasized that the external is internally reconstructed in the process of internalization: "we call internal reconstruction an external operation of internalization" (Vigotski, 1978, p. 56). Both in Rubinstein's refraction and in Vygotsky's internalization, the idea of reflection as a theory of knowledge is present, which constituted a conception of qualitative identity between the external and the internal, between the material and the ideal. In this way, everything that occurs internally needs external influences, removing the generative capacity of the psyche, since reflection is the production of what occurs externally.

If in the beginning of Soviet psychology this objectivist conception of Marxism found a home in Pavlovian reflexology, it did not take long for hegemony to move towards Activity Theory centered precisely on the relationship between the external object and the psychological function. According to Leontiev (1977, p. 181-182)

It is in the activity that the transition or "translation" of the object reflected in the subjective image, in the ideal, occurs; At the same time, it is also in the activity that the transition from the ideal to the objective results of the activity, its products, to the material takes place. Seen from this angle, activity is a process of intertraffic between opposite poles, subject and object.

And then he ratifies that activity implies object, since the expression activity without object "has no meaning at all" (Leontiev, 1977, p. 182).

According to Gonzalez Rey (2016), until the end of the 70s, activity with external objects was the way found by Soviet psychology to maintain its "objectivity". In this period of hegemony of the Activity Theory, an understanding was developed that all formation of consciousness took place from the outside in, and as the activity needed an object, the social was reduced to the relationship with the object in the immediacy of the subject's external context. This reductionism is demonstrated in one of the works of one of the main references of the Activity Theory in education, when it is stated that

The Marxist understanding of the psychic as secondary requires the scripting of the primary material, not only for images, but also for psychic operations. [...] Therefore, psychic activity is the modified external material activity. [...] external objects are replaced by their images, representations, and concepts. (Talizina, 1971 *apud* González Rey, 2016, p. 484).

This type of placement is anchored in the position of Leontiev (1983), who states that the transitions from external to internal activity, and vice versa, are possible because they share a common structure. He states it more forcefully, establishing an isomorphism between the two, saying that "internal activity by its form, *which originates from external practical activity*, is not separated from it, but preserves a fundamental and *bilateral* relationship with it" (Leontiev, 1983, p. 82, translation and emphasis added). Any dialectical relationship between internal and external that existed in Rubinstein's unitary conception of activity and consciousness was lost. In the end, all the complex processes of formation of human subjectivity are fragmented and expressed in terms of activity, converting it into a *supercategory*. With the Activity Theory, the processes of internal organization of subjectivity were

studied as expressions of observable external activity. In this way, empiricism gained strength in Soviet psychology, separating cognitive and affective processes.

However, with Stalin's death and an opening to the freedom of theoretical polemics, a critique of the activity as a supercategory and the way in which this theory had been constructed began at the end of the 1970s, returning with more force at the end of the decade, allowing schools that until then were very small and isolated to resume with some force the research perspectives that Vygotsky initiated and left unresolved. in the same way that they were ignored and discouraged by hegemonic Soviet psychology. We refer mainly to the works of Soviet psychologists such as Bozhovic, Ananiev, Lomov, Chudnovsky, among others who influenced the thought of Fernando Gonzalez Rey and the counter-hegemonic reading of Vygotsky that he carried out until he founded a theory of subjectivity, consolidating an ontological position of subjectivity.

In this sense, the Activity Theory does not provide an ontological status for subjectivity by deriving all subjective positions from activity, which is a category that remains in the internal-external dichotomy and reifies the social as the contextual immediacy of the subjects.

Subjectivity has long been seen as an idealistic problem from the Marxist perspective, and Lukács (2013), who proposes to renew Marxism, qualifies these positions of Marxism as vulgar-mechanistic because they convert the subjective dimension as an epiphenomenon of sociality. Tertulian (1996; 2004) already states that there is in Lukács a phenomenology of subjectivity in which the author seeks the Marxist lineaments of a conception of subjectivity, while Infranca (2018) demonstrates that the study of personality is the study of subjectivity in Lukács.

Lukács (2013), when analyzing work, and then understanding it as a prototype of all teleological putting, detaches an analytical separation from it into two moments: objectification and alienation. The question considered by us to be primordial concerns the fact that this analysis does not end in *Ontology*, firstly because the in-depth study of human subjectivity is a task of Ethics that Lukács did not write, and on the other hand because Lukács still remains linked to a strictly reflective understanding of the human psyche.

The process of objectification of teleological positing alienates in the product of the latter also its subjective qualities and resources of those who are engaged in

the activity of positing. The product of putting is not social objectivity only because it is thrown into the social context or because it is produced in this context, it is so because it objectifies in itself the strictly social subjective qualities of the subjects of the positing. This process of objectifying its qualities is concomitant with the moment when the subject of the positing is faced with its qualities and subjective resources objectified at the end of the positing, alienating itself, that is, confronting itself and all its individual and social characteristics. The fundamental point in this is that the objectification-alienation unity is an active process on the part of the subject, however, this activity faces remnants to be explained in terms of reflection. To this end, a small digression of categorical translation.

The understanding we have of reflection in the common sense of Portuguese, and it seems to me in the Latin languages, is translated into German as *Spiegelung*. However, the term constantly used by Lukács is *Widerspiegelung*, since the prefix *Wider* in German has an active and generative function on the part of the subject. In *Spiegelung*, the end of the process, the reflection [*Betrachtung*], is a passive result that has been reflected by the action of a mirror or reflective object. However, the prefix *Wider* carries the meaning that the reflection actively came from someone. In one word we can translate it as "contrary", however, it has a sense of "throwing something against that which rebuts". In short, in our view, when Lukács uses *Widerspiegelung* instead of *Spiegelung*, he assumes the active and generative position of subjectivity in the process of reflection of an object, a significant philosophical position that does not find terminology in Portuguese².

However, the existence of an adequate term in Portuguese would not effectively solve the problem of the reflexive conception of subjectivity that prevails in Marxism. The theory of reflection is proposed by Lenin in the book *Materialism and Empiricocriticism* (1982) and taken up with greater dialectical depth in Hegel's *Notebooks on Dialectics* (2011) in which reflection, or the capacity for reflection, is an inherent property of all matter. The same position is taken by Rubinstein (1974) when he defines reflection as a property of matter and therefore capable of being reflected in consciousness from the activity. The first caveat is that we are aware that Lenin was not a psychologist, much less

² Some translators exchange reflection for mirroring, but I don't think that solves the problem.

a philosopher concerned with the specific problem of subjectivity. When defining the theory of reflection, he does so according to the material and political problems of his time, however, as far as we know, he never limited the processes of subjectivation to reflection, that is, he did not define reflection as the only form of awareness. This principle will be absolutized in Stalinist vulgar Marxism (González Rey, 2016).

Rubinstein (1974) perceived the problem of the theory of reflection and the passivity of the subject in this process and therefore complemented it with the property of refraction. However, it also constituted refraction as a property of all matter and not as a specific quality of the human psyche. Thus, in their eagerness for objectivity in Marxism and in the constitution of a psychology that met these criteria, Soviet psychologists, despite emphasizing the active role of the subjective in reflection, were incapable of explaining this activity starting from a psychological unit. In our understanding, this occurred through the denial of an ontological status to subjectivity, a task that was recovered and resumed by Lukács and Vygotsky at the end of his life, despite the fact that both did not advance their propositions to their ultimate ends, due to death.

After the 1917 Revolution, there was a period of intense creative freedom in Soviet society, from which Vygotsky's work "Psychology of Art" (1999) emerged. In it, Vygotsky analyzed philosophical, sociological and psychological issues, highlighting that art does not objectively reflect reality and denying the linear separation between internal and external. He argued that imagination and emotion are integrated processes, removing emotion from the physiological field and situating it as a cultural production. With the move to Kornilov's institute, these ideas were set aside due to the influence of behaviorist approaches.

Between 1925/27 and 1931/32, Vygotsky focused on instrumentalist ideas, developing the concepts of internalization, higher psychic functions and the sign as an instrument. These ideas gained prominence in the West for their proximity to cognitivist and behaviorist theories and for the influence of Leontiev's school. Even with contradictions, Vygotsky advanced in the understanding of the psyche as a dynamic system, in which the higher functions are complex social organizations that develop throughout life, based on the relationship of advance and consequence, the origin of his well-known "genetic-general law of cultural development". Because they

are specifically social, the higher psychic functions are based on a relationship of anticipation-consequence, which is where Vygotsky constituted his famous "law":

We can formulate the general genetic law of cultural development in the following way: every function in the cultural development of the child manifests itself twice, on two planes, first the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category. (1997, p. 106)

According to Gonzalez Rey (2016), the genetic-general law of cultural development was removed from its original context and became a central postulate in Vygotsky's work, being used mainly to justify the Activity Theory by emphasizing the psychic as a direct effect of the social context close to the child. However, this interpretation disregards Vygotsky's systemic view, which recognized the fundamental role of the subjects' life history in the development of higher psychic functions. Because of this displacement of meaning, the concept of social situation of development, defined by Vygotsky as essential to understand the process of development of higher psychic functions, ends up practically absent in Western studies and in Activity Theory itself (González Rey, 2016; 2010). The social situation of development is defined by Vygotsky as that which

It represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during a given period. It totally and completely determines the forms and the path along which the child will acquire younger and younger personality characteristics, drawing them from social reality as the basic source of development, the path by which the social becomes the individual. (2012, p. 198).

In this understanding, the psychological is integrated with the social, in which the social influences of each period of development match the history of each subject. Despite this, when he defined that personality characteristics are extracted from social reality, Vygotsky continued to work with the idea of reflection. In summary, as Gonzalez Rey (2016) understands, the Soviet author already understood the psyche in a systemic and complex way, but continued to make these relationships explicit from old and antagonistic categories to his new understanding. Likewise, the affective still appeared as an external catalyst for cognitive development, which

prevented, for example, Vygotsky from being able to develop emotions as higher psychic functions, due to their qualitatively cognitive character.

Towards the end of his life, Vygotsky resumed a concept initially worked on in the Psychology of Art, the experience or *perezhivanie*. With this concept he sought to modify the elementary unit of psychic development. In experience, the unity of the environment with the resources previously achieved by the child is represented, it is constituted as a unit of the social situation of development (Vigotski, 2018). Specifically, "**experience is a unit in which one represents, in an indivisible way, on the one hand, the environment, what one experiences** – experience is always related to something that is outside the person – and, **on the other hand, how I experience it**" (Vigotski, 2018, p. 78, emphasis in the original). It is through experience that the child determines the influence of the environment in the formation of his personality, "the moment is *refracted* through experience" (p. 75, emphasis added). We noticed that Vygotsky sought to disentangle himself in the field of theoretical categories from a problem that he had already overcome precisely in the field of understanding but continued to constantly struggle with the question of reflection and refraction.

Vygotsky found a way to get rid of this problem very close to his death, and this, expressed precisely in the last chapter of *Thought and Word*, is the concept of meaning. This concept was not developed by the author in depth, since he died soon after, however it brought to light an important category that minimally overcomes the problem of the internal and external, the affective and the cognitive, an issue recognized even by Leontiev (1992 *apud* González Rey, 2016) who states that many of Vygotsky's theoretical ideas were not adopted by the Activity Theory, such as that of meaning, which was precisely ignored. According to Leontiev, the set of ideas that make up the dynamic system of meanings "is the unity of intellect and affect" (*apud* González Rey, 2016, p. 1038).

Vygotsky defines the meaning linked to the word by stating that "it is the sum of all the psychological facts that its [word] awakens in our consciousness. Thus, meaning is always a dynamic, fluid, complex formation, which has several zones of varied stability" (2020, p. 465), and goes on to state that the enrichment of words that meaning confers is an intertwining of "intellectual and affective contents" (2020, p. 466). Although this emerges or is generated from a palavrocentric view, Vygotsky (2020) also analyzes and concludes that it is also separated from the word and,

therefore, preserves itself. This movement, in which the meanings are separated from the words that generated them, conformed to their dynamic and fluid character, constitutes a field of meanings in which they "flow into each other and influence each other" (Vigotski, 2020, p. 469). The process of their feedback as a system of senses can be understood in the analysis of emotions that the author performs in the study of the psychology of the actor's creativity:

In the process of social life, feelings develop and old connections disintegrate; Emotions appear in new relations to other elements of psychic life, new systems develop, new combinations of psychic functions and units of a higher order appear within which special patterns, interdependencies, special forms of connection and movement are dominant. (Vigotski, 2012, p. 244).

Thus, concluding his reflection, Vygotsky (2012) understands that the study of these interconnections was the main task of scientific psychology at that time. In conclusion, the author constituted the concept of meaning and experience as units to overcome the dichotomy through which all Soviet psychology passed. Due to his early death, he was unable to effectively develop these concepts in their categorical character. Despite this, this development promoted significant advances that were critically incorporated only 50/60 years after his death, for the constitution of an ontological status, the specificity of the human psyche, that is, subjectivity.

Influenced by the Psychology of Art and the ideas of the last Vygotsky, Fernando Gonzalez Rey, a Cuban psychologist who settled in Brazil, completed his doctorates in the Soviet Union, maintaining direct contact with Vygotsky's disciples and delving into the cultural-historical approach. From Bozhovic's appropriations of Vygotsky, Gonzalez Rey developed his own perspective, adopting a critical stance towards them, and consolidated an ontological status for subjectivity, the central theme of this section.

4 The ontological status of subjectivity

As discussed in the previous sections, the investigation of subjectivity seeks to overcome traditional dichotomies such as internal-external, affective-cognitive, individual-social, and mind-body. Various Marxist approaches, in trying to confront these divisions, have ended up reifying the external to the detriment of the internal or

proposing solutions that have not been able to effectively overcome these dichotomies. In this context, the work of Lev Vygotsky represents a decisive contribution. Although his propositions did not fully solve these issues, they provided significant advances for the contemporary understanding of subjectivity, especially through the concept of meaning developed in the last years of his life, which evidences the concern with a dynamic, complex and systemic psyche, capable of generating processes despite manifesting itself as a reflection of reality.

This concept of meaning allowed Fernando Gonzalez Rey to develop a theory of subjectivity in which its ontological status can be clearly delineated. Subjectivity is no longer understood only as an intrapsychic attribute or error, but is reinterpreted as a symbolic-emotional and, therefore, cultural process. According to Gonzalez Rey (2015), subjectivity, in its cultural-historical perspective, constitutes a quality of human processes inserted in the conditions of culture, always being historically situated. In this sense, it transcends the understanding restricted to intimate and individual experience, characteristic of Modernity. It is not an intrinsic property of the human mind, but a specific quality of human processes, present in all activities, from the body to the most complex social practices and institutions.

Subjectivity is not external to the subject, nor does it manifest itself only in individuality; it is a property of objectivity in human cultural systems. It functions simultaneously as an individual and social process, in which complex symbolic-emotional units emerge following a configurational logic composed of subjective meanings, subjective configurations, individual and social subjectivities, as well as the subject involved in the action.

4.1 The configurational logic of subjectivity

The concept of subjective meaning, strongly influenced by Vygotsky's (2020) thought, has been consolidated as the ontological foundation of subjectivity within the cultural-historical perspective. Subjective meanings are complex units of symbolic-emotional processes, flows of experience that are expressed in multiple symbolic forms and configured in dominant states. They incorporate both the subject's life history and their experience in the present, possessing a plasticity that prevents them from being reduced to fixed states or specific behaviors (González

Rey, 2017). These meanings cannot be defined from concrete essences but can only be understood through zones of intelligibility derived from the multiplicity of processes that are subjectively configured.

The category of subjective meaning allows us to apprehend the specificity of the human psyche and, simultaneously, to incorporate the subjective dimension of collective processes into the social (González Rey, 2016). Through this category, subjectivity reconstructs the psyche and its different forms of production, becoming inseparable from the needs that it generates historically. Thus, "at the subjective level it is impossible for there to be an objective reflection of something that does not depend on the needs of the system it reflects" (loc. 2254). Such needs are expressed both in concrete subjects and in the social contexts in which they are inserted. In this way, subjectivity is not essentialized in universal attributes, being continuously constituted by processes of production of subjective meanings, inseparable from the context and social organizations. By virtue of its complexity and dynamism, subjectivity is in itself inaccessible to direct description, constantly reconstituting itself by the action of the subjects.

The subjective sense defines the specificity of the psychic in human activities and represents an unprecedented condition. In Vygotsky (2020), meaning is associated with the word; in the subjective sense, this link does not exist. These are complex symbolic-emotional units in which the elements imply each other, with no direct causal relationship. They are symbolic processes that manifest themselves in imagination and creativity, unlike cognitive operations, which deal with external information and occur on an instrumental level (González Rey, 2013). The subjective sense constitutes the way in which the subject subjectively experiences his experiences, without there being an objective dimension.

In the subjective senses, symbolic processes and emotions are not articulated linearly. An emotion can involve multiple symbolic processes, and vice versa, without there being a direct causal relationship (González Rey, 2016). In contrast, subjective configurations constitute relatively stable systems, even if they are malleable to the context of action and experience (González Rey, 2011). Every action is organized as a subjective configuration, potentially generating new subjective meanings. These configurations structure subjectivity, integrating meanings linked to individual

personality and social subjectivity, that is, to social relations and the trajectory of the subject's action. The subjective configuration of action is inseparable from the subjective configuration of the personality, in which the personality acts as a generator of subjective meanings without rigidly determining them.

Subjective configurations incorporate the subject's individual history, emerging from differentiated flows of subjective meanings and producing convergent sets, expressed in relatively stable states during action or experience. Gonzalez Rey (2011) argues that human development is a continuous process, in which each moment arises as a result of the subjective organization of previous experiences, while new subjective meanings emerge, modifying the network of dominant configurations. This is the core of configurational logic: subjective meanings flow and can alter the relatively stable configurations of subjectivity.

Subjective configurations integrate historical meanings constitutive of personality and others emerging from immediate experience. Personality can be understood as the system of these configurations in culturally produced contexts (González Rey, 2011). Development occurs in the tensions between personality configurations and emergent configurations in action, generating new subjective meanings that react on the stability of personal configurations. For example, the relationship between an adolescent and a teacher exemplifies this process: the interpretation of the teacher's actions generates subjective meanings that can modify the adolescent's personality configurations. Judgments and emotions are inseparable, composing the complex unity that characterizes the subjective sense.

The genesis of subjective meanings is not only explained by what occurs directly in the immediate experience, but also by the configurations previously formed in other contexts of the subject's life. Thus, subjective configurations are productions of the subject situated in multiple social fabrics, recreated by his imagination (González Rey, 2013).

Subjectivity is configured as a system, integrated by diversified configurations in different contexts and moments of human experience (Martinez; González Rey, 2017). It combines two interrelated levels: individual and social subjectivity. The subjective meanings generated at each level are not external to each other, but distinct moments of the same system (González Rey, 2016). Social subjectivity organizes discourses, myths, representations and ideologies that characterize culture in a specific time and space,

influencing individual subjectivity in a different way. Gonzalez Rey (2008, p. 234) observes that social subjectivity integrates meanings and configurations of different social spaces, so that family conflicts, for example, reflect not only concrete relationships, but subjective meanings mediated by experiences in other contexts.

Social subjectivity, in this sense, is the most malleable element in the constitution of sociality (González Rey, 2016). Its ability to adjust quickly to new contexts is essential for human adaptation, as evidenced by situations of war or catastrophes, in which new subjective processes are produced rapidly. Understanding social subjectivity in this way allows us to explain why certain groups adapt more easily to adversity.

Finally, social subjectivity is a space of integration in which subjective meanings and configurations of different contexts are intertwined, producing dominant systems of meaning. Such systems are shaped by power relations, habits and cultural values, directly influencing who are the individuals and social groups that produce subjective meanings throughout the action (González Rey, 2008). Subjective production does not result only from the spontaneous organization of social relations, but is mediated by codes, values and power relations, consolidating subjective meanings and configurations that guide social and individual life.

5 How does a subject emerge? Questions about estranged subjectivities in the dialogue Lukács and Gonzalez Rey

The subjective organization of society, its social subjectivity, is not a reflection of its constituent systems and structures, but a production that is nourished by these systems, processes and social facts. These, finally, are subjectively constituted as meanings. The processes of social subjectivity are hegemonic social representations, formal and informal normative systems, discursive systems, religiosity, myths, moral and emotional codes of relationship. These processes are socially generated, but "imply subjectively committed action by individuals, groups, and institutions" (Mitjans Martinez, 2020, p. 71)

The subject represents the possibilities of particularization that individuals and groups have within the social subjectivity posed. Because of this, it is always linked to the procedural and tense character that characterizes social life, in which the possibility of permanent and sometimes unexpected changes is opened. A subject is one who exercises

legitimacy from his thought, reflection and decisions. Gonzalez Rey (2016) states that the individual always has two options in social subjectivity, to subordinate himself to the various orders subjectively configured by the institutionalization of these spaces in which he develops, or to generate alternatives that allow him a singularization of his socialization in these spaces, which sometimes lead to changes in social subjective configurations. These options led Gonzalez Rey and Mitjans Martinez (2017) to differentiate agent from subject, concepts that are neither static nor ahistorical, much less substantiated in a specific subjective condition. They are groups and individuals, the authors explain, with the capacity to position themselves and generate, from these positions, processes that are beyond their control or consciousness. The two are active in the face of social processes and experience in the course of their lives, but distinct. The agent actively produces subjective meanings in the course of his social participation, which are linked to this social subjectivity that is immersed, and does not produce subjective meanings that open space for an individual and social subjective reconfiguration. The subject is the one who opens his own path for his subjectivation, which goes beyond the configured social subjectivity where his experiences take place, taking creative actions on them that may or may not be expressed in the action itself.

Every subjective creation puts at risk the institutionalized social subjectivity that is threatened, and, therefore, places limits on those new subjectivations of this subject. Therefore, the emergence of a subject as a proper path of subjectivation in a social context is full of tensions and possibilities. Let us think, for example, of thinking about the arrival of a new teacher in a school, with many ideas and thoughts that diverge from those instituted. There are several possibilities of what can happen, among them that the teacher paralyzes her creative subjectivations and becomes an agent of this social subjectivity, or that social subjectivity itself is strongly reconfigured by these new subjective productions and is minimally transformed. The issue also, and here I am thinking of a point to be developed in the theory of subjectivity, is that the position of power that this new teacher assumes when she arrives, modifies the way subjectivations occur. When we talk about a position of power, we refer to what position she arrives at at the school, whether as a principal, or as an educational leader established in the school system, or as a union leader, etc. All these positions influence the way in which the instituted social subjectivity will be touched by the course of events.

This way of understanding social subjectivity, the emergence of subjects and the constitution of agents, allows us to understand, for example, the processes of indiscipline in school. It is usual for good students to be those whose subjectivations are in line with the subjective configuration of the school, while undisciplined or highly creative students who put this subjectivity in check, generate alternative subjective meanings that conflict with the dominant social subjectivity. These processes appear, for example, in the arrival of a student with disabilities in a class, and the continuous movement of social struggle for an inclusive education of these students demonstrates how social and individual subjectivities act in the course of this struggle.

It is necessary here again to reinforce that the conception of agent does not refer to the passivity of individuals in the face of social subjectivities. There are no passive individuals or groups, since in the course of their experiences they always produce subjective meanings. The primary question arises in relation to the fact that in the agents their subjective action, their subjectivations, do not transgress the normative space institutionalized in social subjectivity. On the other hand, the emergence of subjects is not necessarily linked to a positive result, either because of the possibility of these new subjectivations being pruned by configured social subjectivity, generating a series of traumas and inhibitions, or because of new subjectivations that lead to configurations that do not develop the subject that emerges.

This brings to light a discussion about the articulation between the emergence of subjects and subjective development, which is fundamental for understanding learning processes.

Let's go back to the famous definition of subject by Gonzalez Rey and Mitjans Martinez (2017) in which the person, or group, emerges as a subject by opening "its own path of subjectivation, which transcends the normative social space within which its experiences take place, exercising creative options in the course of them, which may or may not be expressed in action" (p. 73). Here two dimensions appear, two moments of the subject's emergence. When we say that the subject is the one who creates his own path of subjectivation, we refer to the individual moment of the process, while when we say that it transcends the normative social space, we constitute the creative and active social dimension. The opening of a path of subjectivation always refers to the "opening" and not to a concrete possibility. That said, these new subjectivations that transcend the

normative space may not be consolidated because they occur specifically within a field of social relations in which various subjective meanings are produced. The emergence of the subject is always linked to the subjective configuration of the action, and, therefore, there is no way to say that a certain group or individual is a subject or agent, it is not watertight categories that define it. In the course of an action, the subject can emerge, but as it is always linked to this action, individuals and groups are continuously agents and subjects.

The subjective reconfigurations that are expressed and constituted in the course of singular ways of subjectivation of the subjects are subjectively configured in a process of development. According to Rossato (2022), subjective development implies the emergence of configurations that generate new resources and subjective processes in the most varied areas of the life of an individual or group, a process that is largely beyond the awareness of it. Muniz (2020) warns that subjective development is not synonymous with psychic development, since there are operations of an intellectual, sensory, or perceptual nature that do not constitute subjective developments. According to the author, in psychic development it is possible to establish patterns between individuals, to the point that in subjective it is not possible to fix stages in this way precisely because of the uniqueness of each subjective development. Rossato and Mitjans Martinez (2011; 2013) explain subjective development as subjective changes that impact, gain a certain stability and are capable of triggering other changes, generating new qualitative levels of subjective organization. These changes, as explained by Santos and Mitjans Martinez (2019), *can* constitute subjective development, and in a more mature position of the two most important references of the Theory of Subjectivity, this one is understood as

[...] the emergence of new subjective configurations capable of generating the development of new subjective resources that allow the individual qualitative changes in different areas of life and that generate an increasingly deeper personal involvement in the area in which the subjective configuration of development is organized (MITJANS MARTINEZ; González Rey, 2019, p. 17)

Often, this development occurs to the detriment of facing challenges that require new subjective resources to positively impact people's actions in different contexts (MUNIZ, 2020). This subjective development can be understood, for example, in the action of learning in which the subject creates alternative paths, problematizing the data and

advancing in new lines of thought and action not established until then. This type of emergence of the subject makes it possible for the action of learning and subjective development to go hand in hand. The quality of development is never linked to the type of tension or challenge faced, but to the experience of this challenge by the individual and group and the subjective meanings generated by them.

An important issue is that the emergence of the subject can promote subjective development in the course of action, however, this is not mandatory for development to occur. Both agent and subject can subjectively configure development. According to Rossato (2020), the subjective changes that can promote subjective development are constituted as a tetralogical circuit of order-disorder-interactions/reencounters-organization, in which a linear and vertical vision is broken in favor of a processual and configurational conception with a beginning and end constituting the same process. Subjective change is this flow in which the relationship of interactions with order causes disorder, while this encounter with disorder promotes an organization and ordering of subjective meanings, establishing a "dynamic balance" (Rossato, 2020, p. 171).

To develop subjectively is to advance in the generation of subjective meanings of a new type that are stabilized in subjective configurations, constituting subjective resources that allow the subject or agent to respond fully to new social contexts and experiences in the course of his or her action. However, what prevents subjective development? And finally, is subjective development integral human development?

If not every type of emergence of the subject promotes subjective development, it becomes necessary to ask ourselves what kind of emergences of subjects lead to *subjective involutions*, while also understanding whether all subjective development from the objective point of view of the Social Being is effectively a human development.

Subjectivity is a quality of the objectivity of the Social Being, just as every subjective dimension of Social Being implies an objective dimension, that is, one implies the other, without necessarily being causes of itself. Lukács (2013) demonstrates this in the analysis of work and its division into ideal moment and real moment. The use of the term moment necessarily implies the understanding of the determination of reflection between the moments that constitute a unity in difference, that is, neither a position that absolutizes objectivity is capable of explaining the various social complexes of the Social Being, just as not even a position that absolutizes the subjective can do so. Before the development

of Gonzalez Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, Marxist theories explained Social Being from an objectivist perspective, resorting, when dealing with subjectivity, to the theory of reflection or to foundations externally to Marxism, such as psychoanalysis. Gonzalez Rey maintains an essentially Marxist base, but reformulates it critically, incorporating contributions from different theoretical traditions. As Vygotsky (1999) has already warned, it is not a matter of subordinating psychology to Marxism, but of establishing an indirect relationship, since dialectical materialism does not offer direct categories to explain objects from other sciences. Thus, Gonzalez Rey proposes to understand subjectivity as a constitutive dimension of the Social Being, overcoming the Lukácsian reduction of subjectivity to objectivity. While Lukács explains the process of objectification from the theory of reflection, limiting himself to the objective dimension of the Social Being, Gonzalez Rey emphasizes the creative, symbolic and processual character of subjectivity. For him, culture is constituted as a symbolic system produced by the subjects, an expression of human imagination and creativity. Although the symbolic has objectivity, this is always mediated by its subjective genesis. In this sense, Gonzalez Rey breaks with reflection as an explanation of subjectivity and conceives it as an active ontological instance that generates the social itself.

Gonzalez Rey and Lukács complement each other in conceiving the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity of the Social Being. While the former explains how subjective symbolic processes are objectified in systems about reality, Lukács points out that all objectification is a creative exteriorization of the subject. Subjective development articulates individual and social dimensions, emerging in the course of subjectively configured social action. The social context establishes norms that guide subjective meanings, but does not determine them, because there is always the possibility of the subject's emergence. Thus, human choices, even in alienated contexts, express alternative paths of subjectivation and human development.

As we have previously explained, the emergence of the subject occurs in the course of the subjective configuration of the action demarcated in a socially configured context, however, in every subjective configuration of the action the personality of this subject is implied, which in the flow of subjective meanings generated directly influences this production. Explicitly, the emergence of a subject can promote subjective development, a subjective change in which new subjective resources emerge capable of responding to

adverse social situations and that confront this social reality. However, subjective development does not necessarily imply an integral human development when this subject that emerges opens a path of subjectivation marked by its personality subjectively configured by the spaces of estranged social subjectivity or that points to an estranged social subjective configuration.

Let us take an example of a school that has subjectively configured an open and positive posture towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, that is, inclusive education is dominant in this social environment and impels the individuals and groups that compose it in the same direction. The arrival of a teacher resistant to the idea of inclusion, an advocate of a policy of separating these students into special schools and with a biomedical position of disability as "something that the student lacks", puts him in confrontation with the social subjectivity of the school. This teacher has a subjective configuration of the personality marked by subjective meanings that converge in an alternative way to the social subjectivity of the school. From this point, he can emerge as a subject, opening paths of subjectivation to established social subjectivity and constitute a set of subjective resources to subjectively justify and reinforce his position. In the course of the subjective configuration of action, this teacher generates new subjective resources through alternative ways to social subjectivity, having, therefore, developed subjectively in the face of the tension he experienced. However, this subjective development points to a contrary direction of integral human development as a participant in Social Being, as it denies humanity and the right of subjectivation to students with disabilities, promoting exclusion and reinforcing an individualistic position. This teacher emerged as a subject, but he did so in a strange way, out of step with the human possibilities of subjective development.

We can understand then that a subjective development that is out of step with the development of Social Being in its subjective dimension is estranged. In the theory of subjectivity, there is no discussion of the impact of these estranged relations on the subjectivations of individuals and groups. At a certain point, Gonzalez Rey (2019) even points to the need for an in-depth investigation of ideologies, stating that, as mentioned earlier, estrangement is an ideological phenomenon in education, in subjectivity, however, he does not scrutinize the details of the theme.

Estranged social relations exist, they are inhuman relations that objectify and reify subjects, transform them into object beings. From this principle, we cannot deny the central character of this discussion for the subjective dimension. The estranged social subjectivities are, according to the example we analyzed, subjective configurations that stabilize and generate subjective meanings that point to dehumanization, the reification of relationships, the objectification of subjects and the objectivity of humanity.

Estrangement is a social objectivity, since it is constituted in dehumanized social relations that prevent the integral development of subjects as members of the human race. In this sense, it is socially established as a set of symbolic systems, created and imagined, that impact social and individual subjective configurations in the course of action of individuals and groups. These configurations that are organized as subjective dimensions of estrangements are what we understand by estranged social subjectivities.

The grading and credit system is a symbolic system that produces intelligibility about students' learning and development. The fact that it produces reliable information about this learning and development is another discussion. The point is that this symbolic system generates a set of subjective social configurations aimed at control and passivity, and as we have previously analyzed, there is no passivity in individuals, however there can be limitation and control over alternative subjectivation paths. This specific symbolic system, institutionalized since the ideology of mathematical certainty³, generates a system of social subjective configurations about the school that impel the subjects who act in it to a specific type of subjectivation, such as following orders, linearity in actions and meritocracy.

6 Final Thoughts

The theoretical path developed in this article allows us to affirm that subjectivity, far from constituting an idealistic residue to be purged from Marxist thought, is configured as an ontologically constitutive dimension of the social being. The critical analysis of modern and postmodern conceptions has shown that both Cartesian-Kantian rationalism and phenomenological and poststructuralist readings, each in their own way,

³ With this expression, we refer to the belief that quantitative assessment instruments — grades, averages, credits — offer an objective and neutral representation of learning, hiding its socially constructed character and the power relations implied in it (Wagner, 2024)

have imprisoned subjectivity in a solipsistic interiority or dissolved it into pure discursiveness, denying it, in both cases, its own ontological autonomy. This double trap – idealist subjectivism and objectivism that fights it by mirroring its own assumptions – also crossed a good part of Soviet psychology, whose hegemony of Activity Theory, by converting activity into an explanatory supercategory, reproduced the dichotomy between internal and external that it intended to overcome, keeping subjectivity hostage to a reflexive logic incapable of recognizing its generative character.

In this context, the rescue of Vygotsky's late work, with the concepts of meaning and experience, proved to be decisive for the opening of an alternative path, even though the author was unable to develop it systematically due to his early death. In the same way, Lukács's contribution, by situating subjective activity at the heart of teleological positing and by recognizing in the objectification-alienation unity an active process of the subject, represented a decisive advance against vulgar-mechanistic Marxism. However, as we have tried to demonstrate, Lukács remained a tributary of the theory of reflection – even if in its active version, the *Widerspiegelung* – which prevented him from definitively breaking with the subordination of the subjective to the objective.

It is precisely at this point that González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity presents itself as a surpassing synthesis: by conceiving subjectivity as a symbolic-emotional quality of human processes, socially configured and historically situated, the author breaks with reflection as an explanatory paradigm and establishes it as an active ontological instance that generates the social itself. The proposed configurational logic — articulated by subjective meanings, subjective configurations and the dialectic between individual and social subjectivity — allows us to understand the emergence of the subject not as a fixed attribute, but as a possibility that is always open and tensioned, which may or may not translate into effective subjective development.

In this sense, the category of estranged social subjectivities, proposed in this work in dialogue with Lukácsian ontology, points to a field that is still little explored in the Theory of Subjectivity: the possibility that processes of emergence of the subject and even of subjective development occur out of step with integral human development, reinforcing relations of dehumanization, objectification and reification.

It is worth acknowledging, however, the limitations of this study. It is an investigation of an eminently theoretical and bibliographical nature, which did not

propose to investigate the category of social subjectivities estranged in concrete contexts, remaining, therefore, in the plane of conceptual elaboration. Furthermore, the dialogue between Lukács and González Rey, although fruitful, does not exhaust the possibilities of approximation between the ontology of social being and the cultural-historical perspective, and there are still areas of tension — especially regarding the status of the theory of reflection — that would deserve more detailed treatment in future works. The very notion of estrangement, as articulated here, needs to be further explored in terms of its specific ideological mediations, a task that González Rey (2019) himself recognizes as pending.

As future perspectives, it is suggested the development of empirical research, especially in the educational field, which investigates the production and effects of estranged social subjectivities in concrete institutional contexts, such as the policies of inclusion, evaluation and meritocracy mentioned throughout the text. It is also recommended the theoretical deepening of the relationship between ideology, ontology and subjectivity, in order to consolidate this category as a robust analytical instrument for the dialectical and creative understanding of human experience, capable of overcoming classical dualism without incurring in new reductionisms.

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