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Activity As Reality in Defining People and Activity As a Cognitive Construct. Activity and the Activity Approach to Understanding People

The Historical Meaning of the Crisis of Cultural-Activity Psychology

In this article we discuss¹ the past, present, and future of the cultural activity approach as a methodology for integrating the humanities and natural sciences as well as psychotechnical and theoretical knowledge. It is suggested that the meaning of historical crisis of cultural activity-psychology consists in reflecting on the future prospects of its development, bridging the gap between classic and contemporary approaches. We demonstrate the socially constructed role of cultural activity methodology.

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You brute of a century, *who could look* into the centers of your eyes
and with their blood glue back two centuries to a severed spine?

—Osip Mandelstam

Crises are not a temporary condition, but rather the path of the
inner life.

—Lev Vygotsky

Every discipline, like living people, from time to time experiences an acute existential crisis. This experience has a special psychotherapeutic significance that, to paraphrase the well-known formula of Descartes, may be characterized “I experience crisis, therefore I am.” The experience of crises has accompanied the development of psychology throughout the entire history of its development. It touches various schools of thought, research programs, and theoretical aspects of our discipline. The phenomenon described above applies to this paper, which attempts to understand the next crisis in cultural activity psychology.

I would like to say a few words about our understanding of crisis. General scientific methodology as well as various specific sciences have different interpretations of what a crisis is. This paper relies on two interpretations of crisis within the context of the historical-evolutionary approach: a *crisis of development*, which is an evolutionary progression that leads to the development of diversity within the system, and a *crisis of collapse*, which is an evolutionary regression that leads to a decrease in the diversity of the system, its encapsulation and degradation.

Nowadays, more and more voices are talking about cultural activity psychology, or however else we call it, (including cultural-historical psychology, sociocultural psychology, socio-genetic psychology, activity approach in psychology, theory of activity, international cultural activity studies or international cultural-historical-humanities studies) is more and more being converted into the history of science. It becomes the past of psychology, and not its present and future.

In this case, researchers are primarily concerned about how Western psychologists perceive modern cultural and psychological research in Russia. Some of the work published in the West in

recent decades is listed in the References section [58–63; 66; 70–75; 77; 79].

When we ignore these studies, we are refusing to interpret the “deconstruction” of Vygotsky’s ideas, the critical reflexive waves directed at this school. When we speak about “Vygotsky’s Circle,” we unwittingly lock ourselves into this defensive and insulating circle. It is worth stating that *we are the heirs of Vygotsky*, and there is a strong danger within the discipline of psychology that we will turn students into the custodians of this legacy. The interpretation of any criticism represents an assault on the ideological legacy of a particular thinker who changed the scale at which we view culture. There is a privatization of the inheritance of any scientist’s ideas in the form of “special family repositories.” A magic circle is created, like the one in many stories and songs: “Get up, children, and join the circle. You’re my friend, and I’m your friend.” Psychology starts being divided into “*psychology in the circle*” and “*psychology outside the circle*.”

Attempts to reflect on Vygotsky’s ideological legacy, such as critical studies by Revekka Frumkina [50] and the historical and biographical revelations of Igor Reif [46], are classified as being “outside the circle,” as they are underappreciated and even rejected with a certain snobbery.

Treatments of Vygotsky’s ideas by such boundless intellects and cultural academic celebrities as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Roman Jakobson, and Oliver Sacks also are “outside the circle.”

Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Karl Pribram, Noam Chomsky, Rom Harré, Kenneth Gergen, and Stephen Toulmin occupy a special place in the development of Vygotsky’s intellectual space. The following formula applies to all of them: “Tell me with whom you engage in dialogue, and I will tell you who you are.”

A characteristic feature of the crisis of our science is the *gap in the dialogue between classics and modernity*. By reflecting on the crisis of cultural activity psychology, we are able to identify the following axioms and risks.

First axiom. The need for dialogue concerning the development of psychology as a whole, and the place in the development

of this ideology of methodology, theory, and various practices associated with different types of the cultural activity movement in the world of modern psychology.

Second axiom. The need to reflect on myths and the understanding of their origins, as well as the dangers of the canonization of various thinkers. In this regard I have always held to the brilliant formula of the poet Stanisław Jerzy Lec: “Canonization kills the man in my eyes whom I might otherwise have considered to be a saint.”

Third axiom. Presumption of the decency of professionals who are in love with Vygotsky and his school, and understanding their motivation in the development of the sociogenetic tree of Vygotsky’s ideas within science and culture.

This last axiom will help us save ourselves from a powerful psychoanalytic defense mechanism, which we call a *projection*: This mechanism imposes the vision of other researchers on us like Chekhovian “malefactors.” As a result of this mechanism, we begin to discuss the diversity of the ideas of a particular thinker using the style of the oppositionists, revisionists, and “revolutionaries.” We become hostages to imperial isolationist thinking. Such thinking exposes us to serious risks of academic xenophobia, as it divides the world into friends and foes.

The talisman that protects us against this style of thinking is *tolerance in the face of different areas in psychology*.

Now that I have defined a set of axioms that are needed to conduct a dialogue with researchers who study Vygotsky’s creative space, I will proceed to describing some risks that limit our understanding and development of this space.

Risk of scientific-political isolationism is manifested in a number of forms. They include the risk of mutual blindness by representatives of different academic schools and approaches. For example, psychologists in the West are concerned with the problems of cultural activity-psychology, and they often reduce the various lines of thinking within circles of followers of Vygotsky in Russia exclusively to the history of science, sometimes without noticing what is happening in Russia today. Unfortunately, Russian psychologists regard Western academics

in a similar fashion. At best, they are familiar with Michael Cole and James V. Wertsch, and they are somewhat less familiar with the works of Yrjö Engeström and his Danish colleagues (see, e.g.: [62–64; 66]). They are unfamiliar with Alex Kozulin, and even fewer know about Rene van der Veer and Jan Valsiner [75; 76], and so on. This is a problem of many Russian psychologists who are “in the circle.” As a result, we end up with a double vision of Vygotsky: “Vygotsky abroad” and “Vygotsky in Russia.”

There is another, more extreme form of academic and political isolationism: *the risk of sectarianism*. What we mean by sect is the intellectual division of the academic community into exclusively “dedicated groups” of experts and researchers that claim the right to judge Vygotsky and who speak a particular slang and do not want others to be able to understand their language. There are many examples in the history of science when academic schools degenerate into sects, priestly classes and castes. Such intellectual and social encapsulation will cause an academic school to depart from reality and turn into a religion. Thus, it will fall out of international trends in the development of science.

The next risk is *the risk of anniversary historicism*. It manifests itself primarily in two forms: the replacement of science (of ideas) with history of science and the replacement of history of science with canonized historiography, the history of notable dates, anniversaries, portraits, monuments and museums. For example, the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna is very important for understanding of psychoanalysis, and the Jung Museum in Zurich is very important for understanding of the analytical psychology of Carl Jung. However, there is a risk of reducing living history to canonized sacred history and thus burying research programs in museums and changing them into archives, memorials, or imagined mausoleums. Admiration for teachers can turn into ritual worship before their tombs. When this occurs, it does not lead to the development of academic schools, but rather to their demise and consignment to the past. We sometimes lose sense of distinction, and instead of admiring some academics we begin

to bow, but in psychology “admiring” and “bowing” are two different cultural actions.

I will note the following concerning *the risk of reducing monism to monotheism*: on a philosophical level, the methodology of science identifies monism as an epistemological attitude. Today we are witnessing the harsh criticism of monism as a research style, though Vygotsky, Leontyev, and many other researchers were committed to monism to varying extents. This style largely reflects the mentality and ideological tenets of Soviet research. Through the optical lens of increased cognitive complexity it seems justified to differentiate between different forms of monism. In my opinion, it is necessary to distinguish between monism as a method that seeks out the generative basis of various systems (e.g., the doctrine of Spinoza) and monism as monotheism. The first form of monism does not reduce the world to one dimension. It indicates the researcher’s intention to seek out a particular category or other basic category that is used as an explanatory principle for the analysis of various phenomena (concerning this see: [54]).

In our case, we are talking about the cognitive load of the *category of activity* in the research methodology of, for example, Sergey Rubinstein or Aleksey Leontyev. However, none of these researchers applied the entire wealth of psychic life to activity, nor did any of them claim that we must reduce all psychic phenomena to activities or replace the diversity of life with the ontology of activity. They talked about the *methodological meaning of activity as an explanatory principle* and as a *ultimate category in science*. E.G. Yudin’s [54] ideas about activity as an explanatory principle and as the subject of research are very productive and have been insufficiently considered in discussions about the fate of different activity approaches in psychology.

When we criticize the various types *activity approaches*, we often confuse epistemological monism with the monism that degenerated inside a totalitarian system *where it became monotheism, as the belief in one God*. When a category acquires the tinge of divinity, then we slip into sectarian thinking.

We should never ever confuse monism with monotheism as a way of explaining reality. Let us hypothesize that a unique psychological type of thinking informs monotheism—*the egocentricity of consciousness*: There is only the ego, only “my approach,” only “my vision” of reality and no other. In this case knowledge is at the mercy of the formula: “If you are not with us, you are against us.” Instead of discussing academic schools, we engage in the antagonistic struggle of ideologies.

The risk of monotheism is directly related to a number of discussions in the development of cultural activity psychology. Very often our critics claim that Leontyev’s activity approach can be reduced to a category of activity. In this regard, we recall the discussion between Leontyev and Boris Lomov on the topic of “communication or activity?” However, through our critical lens we do not consider either communication or activity in an ontological sense. We understand *activity* to be an *explanatory principle* through which we analyze speech, communication, knowledge, experience, assertion, consciousness, personality, and social groups (see, for example, [3; 14; 16; 21; 30; 42]).

These axioms and risks emerge as moments in a cognitive situation when, in my opinion, it is important to consider the further development of *the scientific and research program of cultural activity psychology*.

In the modern cognitive situation, which is characterized by an increasing role of interdisciplinarity, multiparadigmatic approaches, mixed techniques and methodologies, it has become necessary to reflect on the system of thought that has emerged in the past century, which claims to be one of the leading communication methodologies within the humanities and natural sciences.

Following M.K. Mamardashvili [34], what we mean in this article by methodology is “thinking about thinking.” I note that this construct is used in the works of a number of authors, including E.G. Yudin [55], who has exercised great influence on the development of the system-activity epistemology of knowledge.

I will summarize a number of the basic points that are relevant for expanding the horizons of cultural activity psychology.

1. *Cultural-activity psychology* stands today as a special *social intellectual movement*. Thus, it is not just a school or a path of academic research, but rather one of the intellectual movements of the XX and XXI centuries. Similar movements in psychology also include the psychoanalytic movement, Gestalt psychology, behaviorism, humanistic psychology, existential psychology, cognitive psychology, as well as a number of other areas that have defined the overall picture of the development of psychology. These sociocultural movements, if we use the scheme Vygotsky proposed in his book *The Historical Meaning of the Psychological Crisis* [Istoricheskii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa] [17], achieved the values and level of a cultural worldview in the broadest sense, and they brought together academics from different areas.
2. The evolution of any intellectual movement, especially when it turns into a sociocultural movement, brings not only opportunities but also risks. However, the development and formulation of scientific knowledge often serves the function of *risk management*. This brings us to the next reflection. What are the ideological, political, social, and cognitive barriers that we encounter in the cultural activity movement of our time, which is sometimes called “fluid modernity” (Z. Bauman)?
3. The transition in the cognitive situation from the ideal of classical rationality to the ideals of nonclassical and post-nonclassical rationality changes how we view the development of scientific schools and intellectual movements, and it shifts the focus of attention from *the analysis of texts to the analysis of contexts*. For example, this transition focuses us on the study of the fields of thinking of Vygotsky and his disciples as a source of the intellectual movements of the modern cultural-activity interdisciplinary methodology of scientific knowledge.

When we discuss *cultural activity psychology* as a special methodology and special intellectual movement, we must first investigate the origins of this concept, and when we turn to them, we must distinguish certain *metacharacteristics of cultural activity psychology as a worldview*. They are inherent in cultural activity psychology and most concentrated in the ideas and research of Vygotsky. Among these metacharacteristics I will note the following: (1) liberal worldview; (2) dialogism, open-minded and communicative tolerance; (3) diversity of mythopoetic thought; (4) use of systems analysis in the context of the general methodology of science; (5) commitment to a historical and genetic style of thinking; (6) moderate social constructivism; (7) designing social and cultural practices.

When analyzing *cultural activity psychology* as a liberal movement, it is necessary as part of a frame of reference to explicate value and worldviews that were originally inherent in the scientific research program of the Vygotsky school.

Cultural activity psychology appears when addressing the biography of science in both the texts of our teachers (see [4]) as well as in a number of value-laden slogans, such as the *psychology of a free person* in a free society. I emphasize that there is no scientific development without value foundations. Thus, in France academics are believed to be “immortal”: immortals are those whose ideas permeate time. The ideas of Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontyev prove their right to immortality specifically within the sociocultural liberal movement. I recall that in a series of letters, as well as in his early works dated 1916–18, Vygotsky argued that science, including psychology and philology, must be free from slavish ways of thinking.

During those years that were so difficult for our science, Vygotsky also argued that *the task of psychology was to move beyond the exploration of faceless systems to an analysis of human complexity and the richness of human life*: “The most important thing is life itself—the sky, the sun, love, people, and suffering. These are not simply words. They really exist. They are authentic. They are interwoven into life. Crises are not a temporary condition, but rather the path of the inner life. When

we move from exploring systems to exploring people's fates . . . we are dealing with the birth and death of systems, and we see this firsthand" [40, p. 94]. This formulation—the transition from faceless systems to fate—is incredibly important, because it introduces *the category of fate* into the analytic space of psychology. I place special emphasis on this, on the need to consider not only scientific texts, but also those fields of analysis in which Vygotsky worked. Thus, in a letter to Natalia Morozova, he continues to develop his ideas of humanistic psychology, existential psychology, the psychology of meaning, arguing that we need to build *a specific psychology of the free man* (see [44]).

Leontyev and Luria continued to develop these ideas in different ideological contexts. I denote these ideas in order to identify their value assumptions. Thus, Leontyev very clearly stated the following as a way of characterizing education: There is nothing more dangerous than transformation of education into a factory for production of a society of manufactured minds. "A manufactured mind is a lost mind" [32, p. 278]. Notice here the attention paid to value characteristics: *a factory of manufactured mind* is a unique poetic image. In his conversations with Vladimir Tendryakov, Leontyev said that we must understand the logic of resistance and explore how we move from the logic of resistance to the logic of the life of vital actions [2]. This understanding, affirmation of life, of the life path is a vivid example of the antislave logic that is inherent in the liberal style of thinking. Leontyev also noted the importance of opposing *conveyor psychology*. I see the value vector of the development of the cultural activity psychology underlying this idea.

Leontyev's words that he set down in short notes and spoke in conversations with Tendryakov (in his "walking conversations") [2] are still relevant, where he writes about the need to find the time to discover the personal meaning of all his works. In this regard, my decision to analyze the value foundations of the cultural activity approach is not accidental: there is no science without its value foundations. That is why I have ventured to apply the name *sociobiographical cultural activity psychology* to this type of cultural activity psychology in a number of my works (see, e.g., [4]).

Let us ask ourselves how these ideas arose. From the outset, Vygotsky's line concerning pedology was that psychology has been understood as the science that designs variability. And this is how a means for designing variability and assessing individual differences was created together with corrections, rehabilitation, and development programs. This line was also the starting point of ideas concerning the need to synthesize intellectual traditions and innovations, in which Vygotsky, Leontyev, and Luria adhered to the formula that there would never be (and never were) any members of the school who would not respect tradition. This style of the historical-genetic analysis comes from Vygotsky, who, to paraphrase Pavel Blonsky, said "to understand behavior means to understand the development of behavior." In this case, we see how closely the approaches created at that time repeat each other and were not sectarian. Thus, the fates and perceptions of these people are intertwined: to the representatives of this era Vygotsky was perceived as a poetic person.

Psikhologiia iskusstva [The Psychology of Art], whose first version he wrote aged fourteen, was already a work through which a layer of *mythopoeic thinking* showed through. Mythopoeic thinking is completely committed to a particular type of rationality. And in the same epistemological context in which Merab Mamardashvili criticized the classical ideal of rationality, we were able to identify a positive research program that had been implemented by Vygotsky while relying on mythopoeic thinking. His texts are distinguished not so much by reliance on cognition and values as on *semantic polyphony*. And as Leontyev loved to say, we need to break away from senses to meanings, even if those meanings were formulated in these texts in different languages from the same time.

Thus, I recently analyzed the text *Pedologicheskie izvrashcheniia L. S. Vygotskogo* [Vygotsky's *Pedological Perversions*] (1937), which claims that Vygotsky's positions rely on machism. Today, making such an assertion about Vygotsky's philosophical position could be taken as a compliment. However, we must reconstruct how Vygotsky's actions and texts were received in his time. Vygotsky often appeared to be both a strange, poetic man

and an affective person. Osip Mandelstam's philological division of personalities, which separates poets into the following two categories, completely applies to the image of Vygotsky: "Those devoted to sense" and "Those devoted to meaning." In the opinion of Mandelstam, Valery Bryusov was primarily a sense poet, and Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva, like Mandelstam, were poets of meaning [35]. In her recollections about her meetings with Vygotsky, Nadezhda Mandelstam describes Vygotsky as a talented, bright, and *rational* human being. Such a characterization reflects the dependence of the individual's perception on the value-cultural frame of reference, which in this case can be used by either the poet or the scholar. Continuing this logic, in the eyes of poets Vygotsky is probably devoted to sense, but to other scholars he is most likely a poet, "the Mozart of psychology," "Doctor Zhivago" and "Don Quixote" (see [44; 47; 68]).

It is also important to note that during the first phase of the development of cultural-activity psychology, the discipline was looking for a "name" for itself. It found a self-identity only after a painful process. Today we apply the attributes "cultural-activity" and "cultural-historical" to this school. (Various authors have complained that these characterizations are inaccurate, including, for example [18; 24; 53; 56]).

I will mention a letter that Vygotsky wrote to Vladimir Vagner: "Mr. Vagner, you write that you hold views similar to mine, and that you think I am a Gestaltist. This is not entirely accurate."² In other words, it is important to note the following. We should reflect on how during that time when we were searching for a name for our school that Vygotsky, Leontyev, and Daniil Elkonin were grappling with reality and coming to an understanding of psychology as a science that studies variability in living systems. And what does it mean to propose a science that studies the variability of living systems? It means to oppose totalitarianism and thereby declare that each of us has our own unique destiny and that individuality is difficult to manage.

It is worth mentioning that in the history of the Soviet state there was another sociocultural movement with latent liberal tendencies: *the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School*. I have in mind

the circle of Yuri Lotman and Vyacheslav Ivanov and the brilliant work of Igor Melchuk [37] and E.M. Meletinsky [36]. This movement provides yet another example of the cultural and intellectual movement of the Soviet era. If we compare the afterword that V.V. Ivanov wrote for the 1960 edition of *Psikhologiia iskusstva* [The Psychology of Art] with the one he wrote for the collection *Odissei* [The Odyssey] [24], then we have two different images of Vygotsky: in one V.V. Ivanov, citing B. Bernstein, says that Vygotsky made a discovery that was more important than the discovery of DNA by Watson and Crick; in the other he also points out that Vygotsky proposed a program of cultural codes for controlling behavior [24]. This is how we arrive at Vygotsky's mythopoeic quality. We constantly encounter uncertainty, ambiguity, and polyphony.

In this regard, pay special attention to the point that Vygotsky and his school provide us with an open discourse in the communication system (compare the book by N.S. Avtonomova [1]). They allow others to join this school, but they do not establish a rigid doctrine, thereby preserving the opportunity for dialogue. So I insist: *a willingness to engage other concepts is one of the traits of the Vygotsky school*. This area is inherently open to communicative rationality. Such openness is associated with a liberal outlook, and such openness is valuable in and of itself to us.

I would now like to address E.G. Yudin's scheme for the methodology of science, but in a slightly modified form. When analyzing science, we distinguish the level of ideological content in philosophical methodology, in which we are dealing not only with ideals, including the ideals of rationality, but also with value orientations as well as with very general philosophical categories such as fate and determinism. The second level is the level of general scientific methodology, which for us is usually manifested in the form of system analysis or a synergetic approach. The third level is the level of field-specified scientific methodology. Furthermore, as is known, we should also consider the level of technology, engineering, and research methods.

I believe we need a special type of self-analysis, *a transition from field-specific but still scientific methodology to theories of*

various levels. Thus, the well-known scientific methodologist and sociologist Robert Merton, when analyzing the doctrine of Talcott Parsons's social activities, wrote that it was necessary to create a mid-level theory so that we can combine theory and practice. Merton's concept, which is dedicated to an analysis of science and which prompted a number of imperatives of scientific ethos to be proposed, is completely suitable to be applied to the analysis of psychological knowledge. Merton [38] shows that at higher levels of theory there is no recognized paradigm. Sometimes scientists do not seek to create such a paradigm.

So, by appealing to Yudin's and Merton's concepts for the analysis of science, we can formulate the following. When we talk about the Vygotsky school in terms of the philosophy of methodology, then we can see that it contains *liberal worldviews, mythopoeic thinking, and a transition from the ideal of classical rationality to the ideal of nonclassical rationality.* In this case, I am also relying on the works of M.K. Mamardashvili and V.S. Stepin, who in their analysis of the evolution of scientific knowledge proposed that rationality should be divided into classical, nonclassical, and post-nonclassical types. These types of rationality are directly relevant to an understanding of events that take place in psychology.

Thus, I urge that we *self-reflect about our discipline* (such appeals, of course, are not new—see, for example, Kenneth Gergen [19; 65]. In this context, when we appeal to mythopoeic thinking, it allows us to avoid the pitfalls of both classical and nonclassical rationality, namely the logic of “either-or” binary oppositions. We do not have to decide whether psychology is a natural science *or* whether it is one of the humanities; whether psychology is an explanatory science, *or* whether it is a science that seeks to understand the world? In fact, the ideal of rationality asks us what Lévi-Strauss [29] explored exhaustively in his analysis: the logic of binary oppositions. And here we are faced with the following risk insofar as the logic of “either-or” produces the following very familiar formula when it is raised to the value level of a worldview: “If you are not with us, you are against us.” Such ideological slogans and the logic of “either-or” in reality

are opposed to methodological constructive eclecticism as the establishment of knowledge that allows us to stitch together different pictures of the world.

We next turn to the level of general scientific principles in system analysis. Leaving aside the general arguments about system and system-genetic analysis, I note that the experience of creating the system-activity approach was necessary for our developments, which are most fully expressed in the book *Cultural-Historical Psychology and the Design of Worlds*, as well as in papers where I have explicated the historical-evolutionary approach [e.g., 5; 7–10]. One of the first researchers after Leontyev to reflect on the absurdity of the opposition of the system and activity approaches was E.G. Yudin [54]. It is important to understand that the historical-evolutionary and system-activity levels of analysis are not in opposition to each other, but rather provide different perspectives on the reality under investigation. We have in mind the logic of the historical-evolutionary approach and the logic of the system-activity approach, which do not contradict each other but simply provide different projections. It is appropriate to remember here one of the basic principles of the historical-evolutionary approach: *the world strives for diversity* (see: [57]). N.A. Bernshtein [12], an exemplary nonclassical thinker, identified the aspiration of systems to diversity. He noted that life is not an adaptation, nor is it a balancing act or struggle for survival; it is, rather, the aspiration to disequilibrium and the struggle to overcome entropic effects.

I emphasize that the activity approach has never placed a characteristic value orientation on survival at the value level: it has always emphasized life and not survival. We do not just survive, whether in our lives in the country or in psychology. We simply live. These are completely different concepts and ways of thinking.

When making the transition to the level of discipline-specific scientific methodology, we discover yet another problematic field of analysis. In fact, the introduction of activity as an explanatory principle is an intellectual task at the level of a discipline-specific

scientific methodology. I refer to the analysis that was given in the book *Deiatel'nost' i ustanovka* [Activity and Assertion] [3]).

I would like to explore another point concerning the accuracy of language and the fact that *it is possible to disagree about terminology*. In this regard, in light of the perception of cultural activity psychology, it is important to pay attention to the sharp contrast between the term “formation” and the terms “generation,” “building,” and “transformation,” which reflect the spirit of cultural activity psychology as the psychology of social constructivism. In this context, the term “image generation” is often used by Leontyev. In terms of its significance it is synonymous with the term “building” that is used by N.A. Bernshtein [12] in its classical concept of building movements. In foreign investigations such fine terminological distinctions are important, for example, in understanding the general methodological space of the ideas of Leontyev, N.A. Bernshtein, and Frederic Bartlett.

So, it is possible to disagree about terminology. Following the very same logic, when I refer to psychological methodology and its dialogue with different schools and primarily with behaviorism, we introduced the concept of activity as a *mediating* link (but not as something existing “between” two things, in other words not as an “intermediate variable in the style of behaviorism).

The task of overcoming the postulate of disintermediation has been addressed at the level of discipline-specific scientific methodology by several thinkers, who have introduced the following principles of a mediating link. This link has been identified by D.N. Uznadze [48], but it has been described in the most detail by Leontyev:

- Where there is mediation, there is no subject and object, there is no subject-object opposition, reality is presented to us as a unity of objective and subjective plans of analysis;
- Substance should mediate and act as a principle that connects the physical and mental as well as two mental sequences;
- The mediating link itself should be neither mental nor physical, nor should it be a psycho-physiological phenomenon:

Activity itself is not physical, nor is it psychophysiological or a purely psychological phenomenon;

- The mediating substance must act as a transformer and an interpreter of events in the external world, and it must be able to generate events in the internal world;
- It (the activity as mediating substance) is nonadditive, and it cannot be broken down into constituent elements;
- It has an impact on subjective phenomena, and these subjective phenomena affect the mental world only through it;
- This substance is the main condition for the development and maintenance of the subject's life;
- It must always precede the world of consciousness (for more details see [3]).

However, when we look for a solution to the problem of overcoming the postulate of disintermediation at the level of discipline-specific methodology, all these principles can be formulated not only in a categorical device, whose center is the “activity,” but they can be signified through Uznadze’s category of “assertion” or Sigmund Freud’s category of the “unconscious.” It is important to note that access to this level of scientific methodology allows us to see the connection between various schools and theories and to establish communication between them.

At the level of discipline-specific scientific methodology we also consider the relationship with other concrete sciences, in which the category of “activity” is a key factor. If, by following the spirit of the times, we do not limit ourselves to the disciplinary boundaries of psychology, then we can see that the activity category is present, for example, in economics (see the book by the Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker [11] in which he provides an in-depth analysis of the activity category and its use). Within the same context we should also mention the classic book on economics by Ludwig von Mises [39] and the work of Max Weber [15], who proposed different concepts of activity in sociology. By changing the lens through which we view discipline-specific scientific methodology, we are also able to

single out the work of philosopher Jürgen Habermas [51], namely his theory of communicative actions. Thus, in modern cognitive science we encounter a *communicative space* where there are a number of approaches and concepts, which introduce different projections of the category of activity as a basic category for the discipline-specific scientific theory of sociology, economics, history, and so on. In other words, when referring to the discipline-specific scientific level of scientific methodology, we find the potential of cultural-activity psychology in its ability to enter into dialog with other concepts, schools and approaches.

When discussing the levels of general scientific and discipline-specific scientific analysis, I would like to recall Vygotsky's well-known division of scientific methodology into two types: *shielded methodology* and *skeletal methodology*. Shielded methodology, according to Vygotsky, is like the shell on the back of a snail: you can shed it and proceed, whereas the skeletal methodology penetrates the unified logic of the cultural activity approach. In fact, the following approaches to analyzing various phenomenologies [17] in the "body" of cultural activity psychology represent examples of skeletal methodologies: *genetic*, *historical-genetic*, *structural*, and *functional*.

Later followers of Vygotsky used these analytical approaches, sometimes unconsciously, in varied types of studies. The use of these plans for analysis is a common feature of this scientific school. Regardless of further discussions by interpreters of Vygotsky's work that consist of attempts to oppose cultural-historical psychology with the activity approach in psychology by setting up an opposition between Vygotsky and Leontyev, we should focus our scholarly attention not on shielded methodology, but on *skeletal methodology*. Vygotsky, Leontyev, D.B. Elkonin, and P.Ya. Galperin, while using diverse concepts in their own theoretical research, worked with a common triad, mentioned above: *genetic*, *structural*, and *functional* methodologies. I stress that the above methodological logic unifies our school both in the past and in the present. Moreover, the structural plan of analysis proposed by Leontyev in the system-activity approach that is aimed at studying the "morphology of

activity” should not be interpreted simplistically by reducing it to a textbook description of the structure of activity consisting of activity, action, and operation. When we apply activity analysis in order to understand the development of values, following Vygotsky, this analysis will allow us to break away from consciousness and reach life (see Chapter 7 of *Myshlenie i rech'* [Thought and Language], which argues that thinking and consciousness reveal motivation and life). Discovering the life that lies behind consciousness is the same as discovering the “flow of activity” that generates consciousness and personality. This intellectual approach was developed by Leontyev, Galperin, and N.F. Talyzina, who considered activity to be *a unit of life*. When we understand activity to be a unit of life that generates personality, then we reveal prospects for studying how the person creates meaning [41], the psychology of emotions [14] personology [43], the communicative space of the activity approach and existential psychology, and the psychology of meaning [33].

When speaking of cultural-activity psychology, we should also consider the methodological plans for analysis as specific ways of thought that are inherent in the intellectual approach of Leontyev [31].

First, the *motivational-value semantic plan of analysis* leads us to the study of personality in the process of activities flow in order to find an answer to the question: “For what reason” are certain acts, actions or deeds committed? Essentially, we are talking about singling out *motivational analysis* as a way of thinking in psychological science.

The secondary plan of analysis in skeletal methodology is the *international plan of analysis*, which is particularly pronounced in the study of actions as units of activity analysis.

The third, *operational-technological or instrumental plan of analysis* allows you to select a variety of means, activity methods, or operations, which are used in solving a variety of problems.

And finally, the fourth plan of analysis is a *resource plan of analysis*, which provides us with the opportunity to understand the psycho-physiological mechanisms of realizing an activity as

well as the microstructural analysis of activity (see, e.g., [22]), and so on. By applying the resource plan of activity analysis, we are able to gain a perspective on how psychology is in dialogue with the biological sciences.

When you select different methodological plans of analysis in the cultural activity approach, and in particular if you choose one of the *activity analysis plans* to view phenomena, it will help you identify a variety of psychological concepts and approaches that make it possible to conduct a productive dialogue with the goal of finding common points, intersections of theoretical research fields, and so on. For example, when uncovering the communicative potential of the motivational semantic plan of analysis, we gain insight into the dialogue with existential psychology and we gain an opportunity to reflect on the activity-semantic approach as one of the branches of cultural-activity psychology.

In discussing the motivational-semantic and value plans of analysis, I would also like to focus on the following methodological approaches and programs of research. As Vasiliuk [14] noted, the semantics of the “motivational-semantic plan of analysis” allow us to move beyond the abstraction of one activity to arrive at the analysis of activity flows. And in the same vein, semantic concepts of individuality have been developed in the works of B.S. Bratus’ [13], D.A. Leontyev [33], V.A. Ivannikov [23], A.U. Kharash [52], as well as in our series of studies on the psychology of personality development. The motivational-semantic plan of analysis has also allowed us to develop the concepts of experience [14], semantic establishment of personality [3], and reflected subjectivity [43] among other concepts.

When applying the intentional-target plan of analysis, the connection between the activity approach and K. Levin’s theory of deliberate action becomes more tangible, particularly with his experimental studies of the dynamics of quasi-demands, the phenomena of interrupted actions, the level of conflicts, and so on, as well as with the intentional psychology of Franz Brentano and its modern descendants.

When considering the operational and technological plan of analysis as a methodological tool in cultural-activity psychology, we can clearly see its connection to different areas in cognitive psychological development. Thus, the theory of the gradual formation of mental actions, which was developed by Galperin and continues to be advanced by Talyzina, helped build a bridge to cultural practices and the technologies of modern education. The potential of D.B. Elkonin's and V.V. Davydov's concept of developing training, Galperin's and Talyzina's theory of the phased development of mental actions, and D.I. Feldshtein's theory of the worlds of childhood demonstrate the potential of concepts that are changing practices in modern education. We can change the entire logic underlying the modernization of education if we understand it as *the leading social activity of society* [9]. In addition, the above-mentioned studies most clearly demonstrate the constructivist nature of cultural activity-psychology, its relationship with different versions of the methodology of constructivism (Jean Piaget) and social constructivism (Kenneth Gergen). To support the claim that the activity approach is a relative of social constructivism, I refer to the statement of the German [Norwegian, editor's note] scientist Steinar Kvale: "In a sense, the Soviet cultural-historical school after Vygotsky and the theory of activity of Leontyev and Davydov are close to social constructivism, especially in terms of the dialectical relationship between man and the world and the historical and cultural conditioning of activity" [69, p. 46].

Finally, when realizing the communicative potential of the resource plan of analysis, we reveal the prospects for productive contacts with resource approaches to the study of attention and memory, including with the research of the modern classical thinker Daniel Kahneman.

The resource-based approach presents an opportunity to unite N.A. Bernshtein's concept, levels for creating movements and the accomplishments of A.R. Luria in the field of neuropsychology. It also presents an opportunity to reflect on the connection between the ideas of Bernshtein and of A.A. Ukhtomsky concerning the functional organ and the chronotope. In our

opinion, further development of activity-operational and activity-resource approaches will allow us to identify a special line of thinking that could be called the *cognitive psychology of activity* (such interpretation can be found in the following works [20; 49; 67]).

To conclude, I will turn to the connection between the cultural activity approach and social and cultural practices in which the methodological establishment of social constructivism is apparent. These practices are historically associated with pedology, psychotechnics, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy (see, e.g., the studies by A.A. Puzyrey [46], S.V. Krivtsova and G.M. Nigmatzhanova [27]).

It is important to note once again that, based on cultural-activity methodology, we are moving towards a completely different stratum in the establishment of education practice. Thus, in the context of the system-activity approach, we have developed the concept of universal educational actions as the basis for a new generation of introduced standards (see [28]).

The epigraph to Vygotsky's *Istoricheskiii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa* [The Historical Meaning of the Psychological Crisis], written in 1926, quotes the Bible: "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone..." [17, p. 291]. The historical meaning of the crisis of cultural-activity psychology is that this crisis is a *developmental crisis* and not a crisis of disintegration, just as in the 1920s social practice, which is implementing the methodology of cultural activity-psychology and social constructivism, is now becoming such a "cornerstone."

The past, present and future of cultural activity approach as a methodology for integrating the humanities, sciences, and psychotechnical and theoretical knowledge. It is suggested that the meaning of the historical crisis of cultural-activity in psychology reflects further prospects of development, bridging the gap between classic and contemporary. The article shows the role of sociocultural constructs-activity methodology.

Notes

1. The article is based on a paper that was read at a seminar devoted to the activity approach in psychology on December 12, 2008.
2. Attention should also be paid to the suggestion developed in the works of Anton Yasnitsky to possibly synthesize the intellectual traditions of cultural-historical psychology and Gestalt psychology [79; 80].

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