Activity: Structure, Genesis, and Unit of Analysis

One of the most notable phenomena in Soviet psychology since the late '70s has been discussion of the relationship between communication and activity [8,13,18,19,21,23]. I consider the following formulation of the problem, given here in its most general form, the most constructive: communication and activity are indubitably interrelated, but communication (in contrast to perception, memory, etc.) cannot, in any constructive way, be regarded as a type of activity and analyzed within the framework of Leont'ev's paradigm (activity—action—operation; motive—goal—condition). This formulation of the problem is useful primarily in terms of the further progress of the theory of activity: it quite incisively focuses on one essential point that has been inadequately dealt with in the theory of activity, namely, an analysis of the social means and mechanisms of human activity, both collective and individual.

Sociality of activity: Definitions, phenomena, and mechanisms

Activity, i.e., specifically human, purposeful activeness, developing over time, is social, i.e., it is brought into being by socially significant goals, is subject to social norms, and is corrected by them; and it is constituted through social means and instruments, an axiom that applies equally to any activity, from the activity of mankind in its historical development to any action of a particular individual. Everything that is in activity, i.e., its premises, its...
means, its results—indeed, the very process of activity—is social; and everything social is embodied in activity: in its premises, means, and products—indeed, in the very process of activity. These postulates have been developed in extreme detail in Marxist philosophy: "Activity and making use of its fruitfulness are social both in content and in mode of existence: social activity and social use" [1. P. 118]. Another of Marx's postulates, no less familiar, bears directly on psychology: "But even when I am involved in scientific activity, etc., activity that I can only rarely carry out in direct communication with others, even then I am involved in social activity, because I am acting as a human being" [1. P. 118].

Of course, all these postulates have long been familiar to Soviet psychologists (in particular, the above-cited statements by Marx have been universally known in our psychology since the '30s—see [24]). However, a number of difficulties, which in many respects have not yet been overcome even today, have been encountered in the process of putting them to use creatively in the theory of activity.

Social psychology has accumulated a vast amount of empirical data over the last century (traditionally, the work by N. Triplett [34] is considered the first) on how behavior and cognitive and affective processes in human beings vary as a function of the real or imagined presence and actions of "other" people. Such are the phenomenal manifestations of the social nature of the human mind and human activity. But by what means can the psychological theory of activity explain these phenomena and the psychological mechanisms of the social nature of activity?

The theory of activity (here and henceforth we are referring to A. N. Leont'ev's theory of activity) has, of course, developed a quite detailed notion of the morphological structure of activity (activity—action—operation; motive—goal—condition), and the conditions for the transition from one level of activity to another (in particular, through the "shift of the motive to the goal"), etc., have been demonstrated [14,15]. However, this morphological paradigm does not explain very well why activity should change because of the real or imagined presence of other people; what, from the psychological point of view, the qualitative difference is between "another" human being and any other physical object; or a number
of other sociopsychological (and also general psychological) phenomena related to communication, interaction, etc. Strictly speaking, in all these cases, if we remain within the framework of the theory of activity, we can say only that the motive of activity and its operational and implementational aspects are social. But actually, to say this is not to explain, but merely to assert, and such an assertion merely completes a logical circle: the social nature of motives and means of activity is not reflected in the distinct structure of activity, is invariant relative to this structure, and is postulated in real terms only on the basis of the external phenomena of the social nature of activity, i.e., of the very thing it is meant to explain.

Leont'ev himself said:

Can we assume that an adequate activity is formed in a person under the influence of objects themselves? The untenability of such an assumption is obvious . . . relations to the world are always mediated by man's relation to other people; his activity is always included in social communication. Communication in its original external form, in the form of joint activity or in the form of speech or even only intellectual communication, is a necessary and specific condition for man's development in society [15. P. 413]; . . . essentially, activity presupposes not only the actions of a person separately but also his actions under the conditions of the activity of other people, i.e., it presupposes some joint activity. [13. P. 19]

However, these views are not really confirmed by the discrete structure of activity. From the standpoint of the concretely described morphological structure of activity, i.e., that with which an investigator can only really work, activity is in fact formed under the influence of objects themselves; joint activity does not presuppose the morphology of individual activity, etc. Very likely, Leont'ev, who considered his theory incomplete and only outlined the direction of its further development [14], intended to undertake an analysis of the social mechanisms in the structure of activity. Perhaps this explains his interest, especially strong in his last years, in the problem of meaning [14], in which a number of his students saw the beginning of some new stage in the development of the theory of activity that he was unable to bring to fruition [25].
Let us now formulate a more specific task: that of explaining phenomena reflecting the social nature of activity from the standpoint of current notions of the structure of activity (or transform these ideas in such a way that they will produce an explanation).

There is probably no term more frequently used in psychology than *structure*. But this is a very complicated concept. The structure of a phenomenon (object) is traditionally understood to be the configuration of its relations (both internal, among the elements of the object, and external, with other objects). This configuration is the basis for the identity of the phenomenon (object) with itself, its invariance relative to its transformations, etc. But it is difficult to examine activity from the standpoint of its identity and invariance because it is a process, i.e., it takes place in time. When we speak of the structure of an object (for example, a physical object), it is explicitly assumed that the object is "arrested" in time, i.e., when we elucidate the structure (in particular, the spatial structure) of an object, its changes over time are ignored; it is assumed that the structure is invariant with regard to these changes. A law of transformation has been formulated for when an object changes in time.

This circumstance was one of the chief obstacles to application of the structural principle to an analysis of social phenomena, social activity, and mental phenomena, i.e., processes changing continuously and irreversibly over time, so that the present state of a process does not permit us to reconstruct its preceding stage unambiguously. H. Bergson [3] and W. Dilthey [9], who ultimately denied that psychology could be an objective science, clearly outlined the difficulties in delineating mental structures.

A genuine solution to the problem of applying a structural method to an analysis of social activities was found by the classics of Marxism, which also left models for such an analysis in history and sociology (see [11,20]). We may attempt to formulate some conclusions of importance for psychology on the basis of the methodology of this analysis as follows.

First, cycles within which the sequence and relationships of elements are stably and lawfully reproduced are distinguishable in the continuously changing process of human activity. These also serve as the structure of activity, the basis on which activity is constructed.
and accounted for. The means and instruments of activity are of prime importance in the structure of activity.

Second, the structure of activity has many levels. The structure at the surface, i.e., the external manifestation of the process of activity, is determined by the deep structure of activity; and a person may not even be aware of that deep structure, it may not even be reflected in his self-report. The surface and deep structures are not identical: the latter is derived from the former through specific transformations.

Third, Marxist analysis is a structurogenetic analysis. This means, in particular, that the basic, generative structures were formed earlier in time than external structures, the structures of the directly observable process. A base structure is a structurally and genetically primary formation, a primary unit relative to the overall process of activity; the entire process unfolds from the structure of this unit. Marxism has provided a model of the method for going from the abstract to the concrete; it has shown how the structure of the system of social activity is derived from, and unfolds from, the structure of this basic unit. In this sense the basic unit is also a unit of analysis of the process of activity, i.e., an analysis not at the level of phenomena, but rather a structural genetic analysis. Soviet psychologists incorporated these postulates in the 1920s.

For example, Vygotsky, starting with Marx’s analysis of the unit of bourgeois society (the form of commodity value), thought that the most important problem was to find such a unit (or unit of analysis) in psychology [4. P. 407]. It is well known how Soviet psychologists, on the basis of Marx’s premises on the role of practical activity with objects, began to view object-related activity and object-related action as a structural genetic unit of the human mind. Despite a number of achievements, difficulties arose, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article, difficulties that became especially evident in attempts to analyze the problem of communication from the standpoint of activity theory. Basically, I repeat, these difficulties were related to attempts to explain the social nature of mental processes and of activity itself.

If we take a cycle of human object-related activity unfolding in a “subject-object” system and analyzable using the paradigm “activity—action—operation; motive—goal—condition” as our unit of
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analysis and add to this unit general principles, deriving from Marx’s methodology, for a structural analysis, we get the following picture. First, the tools and instruments of activity are not discretely defined in the structure of activity. Strictly speaking, operations should be classified among the means of activity, but they themselves are clearly defined “from above,” from goals and actions. A typology of operations that are constant relative to different goals and actions has not been developed. Second, the structures of all activities are isomorphic (i.e., there is a single universal structure). The profound heuristic postulate that structures exist at many levels and that generative structures undergo transformations has not been employed. Third, the genesis of an activity itself is not known, i.e., the genetic structural original unit on the basis of which the structure of activity develops and determines the external parameters of the process has not been demonstrated. In other words, I think that the well-known view propounded by E. J. Yudin that there is a difference between activity as an explanatory principle (which we correlate with the generative structure of activity) and activity as a subject to be studied (which we relate to the “external” structure of activity) is profoundly correct; but I cannot agree with the particular conclusion he drew from this idea. Yudin was inclined to regard the paradigm “activity—action—operation; motive—goal—condition” as an explanatory principle that required substantiation (and perhaps modification) in terms of the subject under investigation [28]. I, on the contrary, consider this paradigm (even taking into account possible changes), in principle, as part of the “external” structure of activity (according to Yudin, activity as a thing to be studied). On the other hand, notions of the generative deep structure of activity, and hence the genetic structural units of an analysis of activity (activity as an explanatory principle, according to Yudin), require further development.

Unit of analysis of activity—social (joint) action

Considerable experience has been accumulated by contemporary psychology in analyzing the problem of the social mechanisms and
structure of an action. One interesting current is symbolic interactionism [30], especially when combined with a number of Talcott Parsons's ideas from the theory of social action and, in particular, his works on "symbolic action" [31,32]. There have also been a number of studies in this area by the French psychological school (Janet, Piaget) and in psychoanalysis (especially in the schools of Jung and Lacan). Here we shall concentrate on analysis of problems of social mechanisms and their place in the structure of activity as carried out in Soviet psychology, since these problems most closely reflect the contemporary state of the theory of activity in Marxist psychology.

M. M. Bakhtin and L. S. Vygotsky made major contributions to the unravelling of these questions. An analysis of some of their ideas in light of the present state of the psychological theory of activity is constructive. Above I stated that my analysis would pursue no historical objectives and that hence it was not essential to clarify the objectives of particular authors (for example, the debate about whether Vygotsky developed the theory of activity in psychology). For me, another point is important, namely, to what extent an author's texts can be useful in dealing with a number of current problems in the theory of activity.

Earlier, starting from general methodological conditions, I hypothesized that activity contains structures on several levels, and that the basic, genetically primary, unconscious structure is the most important inasmuch as all the superadjacent structures are formed on the basis of its transformations. This basic structure should be the earliest in both phylogeny (when the fundamental preconditions for its formation are established) and in ontogeny (when it is actually established in an individual). It proved quite constructive to note a number of Vygotsky's views on internalization and ontogeny from this standpoint. When he analyzed ontogeny, Vygotsky emphasized the fact that the child's primary activity is always joint activity (for example, together with the mother). He wrote that the child "enters into a relationship with a situation not directly, but through another person" [7]. Later, he adopted the concept of internalization developed in the French school and formulated the essential nature of internalization of joint activity as follows:
We could formulate a general genetic law of cultural development as follows: any function appears on the scene twice in the child’s cultural development, on two levels: first, the social level, and then the psychological level; first, between people, as an interpsychical category, and then, within the child, as an intrapsychical category. [6. P. 145]

In another place, where he explains the importance of internalization as a transition from the external to the internal, from the social to the psychological, Vygotsky wrote: “The structure of social relations is shifted to within the child’s psychological system, but it preserves all the basic features of its symbolic structure in the process” [7]. How are these ideas important for us? The idea naturally arises that the basic structure of human activity is formed in early ontogeny on the basis of the internalization of the structure of external joint activity into which the child is drawn from the moment of his birth. Then we can assume that “...the structure of social relations is shifted to this basic structure of activity, but it preserves all the basic features of its symbolic structure in the process” [7]. The latter point is the most important. The internal structure preserves all the basic features of its symbolic structure, i.e., including signs. The extreme importance Vygotsky attributed to signs is well known: “The sign and ways to use it are a functional, determining whole or focus of the entire process in a higher structure” [6. Pp. 106–107].

Thus, the structure of joint activity includes signs. A sign is a conventional designation with a meaning; it is always addressed to a partner, and is a concrete vehicle of the social nature of joint activity. Later, when the basic structures of the activity of the individual (child) are formed in the course of internalization of the structures of joint activity, the latter incorporates signs as well—indeed, as the most important element in the structure of activity. It is understandable that the structure of joint activity should change in the course of internalization. The transformation of one sign structure into another conforms to the nature of the sign, about which the founder of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce, wrote: “The whole purpose of the sign consists in the fact that it will be inter-
interpreted in the form of another sign” [33. Para. 191].

The questions of signs and their place in the base structure of activity should be examined in more detail. We can only define these signs negatively. First, like the base structure as a whole, these must be unconscious signs (in contrast to ordinary signs, including verbal, linguistic signs). In one place Vygotsky wrote that he did not know if a sign had meaning [5. P. 158]. This is a very profound thought. Indeed, in what sense can one speak of a “sign without a meaning” (i.e., clearly a logico-semantic meaning)? What, in that case, “remains” of the sign, and in what sense can this residue then be regarded as the most important element of the base structure of activity?

In my view, from a psychological standpoint one must structurally distinguish among several types of signs: an ontogenetically primary sign; a sign without meaning (an element of the base structure of activity), an unconscious one; a conscious and verbal sign—an element of the external structures of activity. These signs are linked together by the relations of a genetic-structural continuity and have a number of features in common.

Specifically, what I mean is that the general structure of an ontogenetically primary joint activity (or, more precisely, a primary joint action) includes at least the following elements: subject (child)—object—subject (adult). The object also has a symbolic function and serves as a primary sign: indeed, a child’s movement toward an object, his manipulation of it even when his goal is the satisfaction of a vital need, is at the same time a sign for an adult, to help, to intervene, to participate. The findings of child psychology tell us that both the adult and the child perceive the situation in this way; in other words, genuine communication, symbolic communication between the adult and the child, takes place here [15,17,27,29]. In this case object-related action is constructed around the object as an object, and symbolic communication is constructed around the same object as a sign. Communication and object-related action coincide completely, and can be separated only artificially into two different projections of the same thing. We see, then, that in this case a sign (in my terminology, an ontogenetically primary sign) is simultaneously both objective and social. But this sign really does have a
meaning in the traditional logico-semantic sense. We further assume that during the course of internalization of primary joint activity, the entire structure of relations existing in it (subject–object [sign]–subject), preserving the unity of objectivity and sociality "coded" in it, is compounded, transformed, and translated into the structure of an "internal," unconscious sign, a sign as an element of the base structure of activity. This would also explain the simultaneous objectivity and sociality of the base structure of activity of an individual; it would explain the origin of the structure of the individual's activity in terms of the joint activity of communication.

The transition from the base structure of activity to the "surface," conscious structure of activity takes place by stages. However, signs occur at each stage as important elements in the structure of activity, as the social means (instruments) of activity. Clearly, the structure of the sign should also then be transformed: from the structure of an "internal," unconscious sign to the structure of an "external," verbal, conscious sign. In all these transformations, which "expand" the structure that had been compacted into the structure of a sign during the primary internalization in ontogeny, the sign preserves, intact, its objective reference (a sign is a sign of something) and its social character. This also defines the external manifestations of an activity developing on the basis of symbolic structures as being both objective and social activity, "open" to communication and interaction.

We find a similar understanding of the role of signs in many psychologists. A well-known statement by Leont'ev is relevant in this context. He wrote: "Socially elaborated modes . . . of action are concealed behind linguistic meanings (meanings of the sign—L. R.)" [14. P. 141]. If we introduce an important but obvious refinement, that these are methods and structures of social (joint) actions internalized in ontogeny, we in fact arrive at ideas very similar to those presented above. A number of Vygotsky's ideas that actually demonstrated transformations in the structure of a sound in the course of internalization in the transition from "internal" to external signs, and to the construction of external activities, are even more interesting. Referring to transformations in the process of transition from internal structures to external structures during
the course of the construction of an external activity, Vygotsky said
that externalization involves "a redivision of what is now (in the
internal structure—L. R.) fused into one . . . the expansion of the
entire mental process into a drama taking place between people" [6.
P. 145]. This view is very close to the hypothetical arguments
presented above. First, a number of transformations in the course of
internalization and externalization are outlined paradigmatically.
These transformations take place in opposite directions: what was
initially "divided into two" in the course of internalization becomes
fused so as then again to be divided into two in the course of
externalization, to "unfold into a drama taking place between peo-
ple." As I have already said, I interpret this to mean that the initially
disjunctive ontogenetic relation of "subject—object (sign)—subject"
is "fused into one," into the structure of an "internal" sign during
the course of internalization. In externalization, in the opposite
direction, a transformation of the internal structure, that which was
"fused into one" is again divided into two, into a "drama taking
place between people," i.e., the external structure of an individual's
activity reproduces in its fundamental aspects the structure of the
ontogenetically primary joint action: it is "open" to communica-
tion and to joint action; it presupposes them.

The above description of the structure of activity differs from the
description of object-related activity in the system "subject—objec-
t" analyzed according to the paradigm "activity—action—oper-
ation; motive—goal—condition" in several respects. First, social
means and tools of activity, signs at various levels, are distin-
guished. Second, it takes into account the multilevel structure of
activity, in which the different levels are isomorphic to one an-
other, but linked through transformation relations. Third, the initial
structural genetic unit from which the structures of activity at differ-
ent levels develop is shown, i.e., ontogenetically primary joint ac-
tion. The last aspect must be regarded as particularly important; at
this point we encounter an attempt to introduce a new unit of analysis
of activity, one aspiring to explain the objective social character of
the activity. Joint action is a unit of analysis in three mutually related
aspects: as genetically primary, as determining the structure of
activity at all levels, and as a universal component of the external process of activity.

Explication of the concept "joint activity" as a unit of analysis of the individual's activity is centered on an analysis, from this standpoint, of a number of the views of not only Vygotsky but also M. M. Bakhtin, who managed to formulate similar questions especially sharply and distinctly (for the relation between the works of these two scholars, see [10]). Bakhtin proceeded from the assumption that "the higher mental functions always exist only in symbolic material" [2. P. 37]. He of course considered the word to be a universal sign. He stressed the social origin of the word: "The word had first to be born and come to maturity (ontogenetically and phylogenetically—L. R.) in the process of social communication among organisms in order then to become part of the organism and an internal word" [2. P. 50]. However, the structure of a word must also be social in origin, and here we move on to what are, for our purposes, the most important of Bakhtin's ideas. The unit of speech communication (i.e., in the final analysis, of all mental functions) is a unit both in the sense of being a universal component and a genetically primary structure, and, finally, a structural determinant; Bakhtin considered the statement to be this unit. Bakhtin defined a statement primarily in terms of its limits.

The limits of every concrete statement, as a unit of speech communication, are defined by an alternation between speaking subjects, i.e., an alternation between the speakers. Every statement, from the shortest (one word) reply in an ordinary dialogue to a large novel, . . . has an absolute beginning and an absolute end: before its beginning, the statement of others, and after its end, the replies of others (or even a tacit, active understanding of the other person as a response or, finally, an act based on such an understanding as a response). . . Dialogue, in its simplicity and clarity, is the classic form of speech communication. [2. Pp. 249-50]

Why did Bakhtin undertake such a classification? Why did he classify together such different phenomena as a reply in a dialogue (for example, "yes" or "but . . .") and a long novel, a scientific
treatise, etc.? Why did he think that the dialogue was the classic form of a statement? “However different statements may be in their scope, content, and compositional structure, they have common structural characteristics and quite distinct limits” [2. P. 249]. But what meaning do these structural features have: Are they not simply a formal criterion on the basis of which something can be classified with something else?

The significance of Bakhtin's work, in the context of our task, lies in the fact that we are attempting to resolve a problem analogous to the one with which he was dealing, namely, to shed light on the internal structural mechanisms underlying the social nature of human speech. The fact that speech (like activity) is social was obvious to all. But linguists were never able to explain the mechanisms of the "sociality" of speech. The founder of modern linguistics, F. de Saussure, who represented the linguistic aspect of the methodologically unified French sociological school, going back to Durkheim (Janet, the creator of a concrete theory of internalization, headed the psychological offshoot of this school), in accordance with Durkheim's general principles rigorously contrasted a statement as an individual act of combining linguistic forms to the system of language as a social phenomenon constraining the individual. On the basis of such a position, the social phenomena of language can be affirmed, but their manifestations cannot be perceived in the structure of an utterance itself, though these manifestations are the preconditions of the social nature of an utterance. Hence, Bakhtin, in searching for structural explanations of the social nature of a statement, managed only to "perceive" the fact that a statement was limited by nothing other than the statements of other people, or, more accurately, he succeeded in understanding completely the critical significance of this fact, namely, that an utterance, bounded by the utterances of other people, constitutes a complete system.

The completeness of an utterance is the internal aspect of the alternation of speakers. . . The first and most important criterion for the completeness of an utterance is the possibility of answering it, or, more precisely and more broadly, taking a specific position with regard to it in replying (e.g., obeying an order). . . The
attribute of wholeness of an utterance cannot be defined either grammatically or in terms of an abstract sense. [2. P. 255]

Thus, the most important structural attribute, the boundaries of an utterance, also mark its completeness. This completeness is neither grammatical nor semantic, but social. The mechanism of the sociality of speech lies not only in the fact that it is governed by abstract social linguistic norms existing beyond it and independently of it but also that the material unit of speech, the utterance, "must be regarded as a response to preceding utterances" [2. P. 271] and is the premise for subsequent statements, i.e., responses. This structure of the system of an utterance rigorously determines the fact that an utterance is oriented toward an "other" (real or ideal), and depends on that other, i.e., an utterance is social. Of course, in like measure, an utterance is oriented toward an object, it is an utterance about something.

It is not difficult to see that Bakhtin's works are very important for us in this context: by analogy to his delimitation of the boundaries of an utterance, we may plausibly delimit the boundaries of joint (social) action, which is the unit of individual activity. In this case the boundaries of a social act must be seen not in control over (use of) the object (physical or ideal), but in its link to the action of another person. Of course, a social act is objective: at any given moment it is aimed at an object, defined by an object, etc. But the limit of a social act, its link to the act of another person, alters radically the entire system of the act and introduces a social element into its very definition. Hence, a sign must also occupy an important place in the structure of an act, i.e., a sign addressed to an "other" and eliciting an act in response that serves as the completion of that particular act.

This unit must be regarded as a genetically primary unit (in ontogeny), determining the basic internal sign structure of human activity, and, finally, as a universal unit, a component of individual activity. The latter circumstance deserves special consideration. A unit is not simply a universal component. The uniqueness of a unit lies in the fact that the basic features of the whole are reproduced in it. It is thus useful to distinguish a social act from the traditional concept of an "object-related" action, since the main features of
human activity, i.e., object-relatedness, its social nature and its sign character, are reproduced in it. A social act is similarly a unit of collective activity. Thus, the possibility of analyzing individual and collective activity with the same tools appears, the gap between them disappears, and the prospect of a unified theory emerges. This, however, is a separate question that goes beyond the scope of the present article, which is concerned with an analysis of the social mechanisms of individual activity.

Let me point out that the response of an "other" (this is the boundary of a "social act") must not be understood literally, as a real act of a real person. If a response action were interpreted in this way, it would be necessary to group within one category phenomena that are psychologically disparate: the micromovement causing a prompt micromovement in response, and an individual's activity, which is extended over time and complexly organized. The following formulation of the question is more plausible: Ontogenetically (especially in early ontogeny), a joint act (together with an adult) was the unit, the real unit of a child's activity. Genesis also determines the structure of subsequent activity, although, of course, it is not determinate in a literal sense. The subsequent actions of the person are also joint—not in the sense of being in direct contact with a material response from an "other," but in the sense of being oriented toward such an act in response. In paraphrasing a famous definition given by A. N. Leont'ev, that an object is the true motive of activity, we may say that an actual motive is an object-related action as a response (real or imagined). This circumstance also explains certain dialogic phenomena in a number of human cognitive processes and phenomena of "anthropomorphization" of the object of activity in which a physical object is perceived and described in anthropomorphic terms (for example, in scientific texts, "the charm of a particle," the "behavior of a cell," etc.).

To recapitulate: I have attempted, on the basis of an analysis of the literature, to outline some theoretical possibilities for the relationship between collective and individual activity, communication and activity, and the sociality and object-relatedness of activity, and to suggest possible structures underlying the sociality of individual activity. I hypothesized that there were several levels in the structure
of activity that were not isomorphous to one another, but were linked by relations of genetic continuity. The external picture of individual activity is played out on the basis of these structures. The deepest structure is formed on the basis of internalization of ontogenetically primary object-related activity and joint activity, which at the same time is also communication. The central elements of this structure are signs in which object-relatedness and sociality are inseparately connected. Later, in the course of externalization and the generation of external activities, the base structure undergoes a number of transformations (the structure of signs is also transformed). As a result of all these transformations, the external activity of human beings is played out, in a number of its aspects, in a way fundamentally similar to genetically primary joint action, the internalization of which generated the base structure of activity, which is primarily object-related and social. The unity of analysis of individual activity (both in a structural genetic respect and in the sense of being a universal component) should then be seen as a social (joint) act, an act oriented not only toward an object (although an object is necessarily a component of a social act) but also toward the object-related action of another person.

References