

## **Part I: Foundation of Activity Theory**

### **Chapter 3: Human Activity. The Anthropology of Activity Theory**

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# 3. Human Activity

## The Anthropology of Activity Theory

In the preceding chapter, I introduced the basic concepts of anthropology. This introduction was presented, however, within the general frame of the total ontology, or if you prefer, metaphysics of Activity Theory. Thus, the more detailed analysis and argumentation are carried out in the remaining chapters. The present chapter is just the *overture* of this analysis. Each of the chapters to follow is dedicated to a specific aspect of the anthropological field. In the current chapter, therefore, I try to give definitions that are more precise. I also present preliminary argumentation for all the major aspects of the anthropological object field, these major aspects being what I consider the *anthropological invariants*. Each of these aspects will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters dedicated to a single invariant. This logical structure, no doubt, will appear at times to the reader as somewhat tiresome. I have attempted to avoid unnecessary repetitions, but the reader should be warned that all the basic ideas of this treatise are presented in a three-fold structure. In other words, they are presented as headlines in the last section of chapter 2, as individual sections in the present chapter, and finally at some length in the subsequent chapters.

Another warning seems necessary here. In the first two chapters, I did not stray far from Leontiev's theory. My interpretation of his basic concepts, especially activity, action, meaning and sense might have been subjective, but with my intention was to express his original thoughts. In this and in the succeeding chapters, however, I will present my own version of Activity Theory. This implies that often I use my own definitions of basic concepts. Further, although I have not intended to deviate from Leontiev's theory regarding the basic concepts of activity, they certainly have developed an idiosyncratic flavour and often a new emphasis. As already stated, I use typographical markers to signify whether a specific concept is used in a standard way or whether it is of my own design. In the former case, the concept is printed in *italics*, and in the latter in **bold**.

One especially important case of my personal definition is regarding the concepts of *Activity* and *Meaning*. And as I already explained, a curious ambiguity sticks to these concepts when seen in relation to their closest co-concepts Action and Sense:

### Use of the Concept Pairs: Activity-Action and Meaning-Sense

Concept	Object Field		
	Biological	Sociological	Psychological
Activity	+ (broad Meaning)	+ ( <i>anthropological</i> Activity)	? (marginal use)
Action	- (not present)	- (not present)	+ (central use)
Meaning	+ (broad Meaning)	+ ( <i>anthropological</i> Meaning)	? (marginal use)
Sense	- (not present)	- (not present)	+ (central use)

Firstly, the table emphasises the crucial importance of specifying whether the concepts *Activity* and *Meaning* are based on their broad, *biological*<sup>1</sup> or their specific *anthropological* meaning. Secondly, the table shows that when based on their *anthropological* meaning, the two concepts are used mostly within sociology, whereas the concepts *Action* and *Sense* are mainly used within psychology.<sup>2</sup>

This current chapter is dedicated to general anthropology and it will be apparent that I have chosen *Activity* and *Meaning* rather than *Action* and *Sense* as my basic concepts. This choice is a consequence of the very objective of this treatise. The objective is not to discuss the foundation of psychology narrowly, but rather to show how the general field of anthropology can be founded on *Activity Theory*. Therefore, the discipline of sociology (social science) is just as important as psychology. Consequently, I have chosen basic anthropological concepts that are suited to explaining these dual anthropological sciences, and even their relation to one another.

Another problem of presentation is choosing the order in which the concepts are to be introduced and treated. Two approaches to presentation can be used. The first approach is *genetic* or historical, where the concepts are presented in the order in which their respective referents appear in time. The second approach is systematic or logical, the intention of which is to erect a tower of

concepts in such a way that any subsequent concept can be defined by means of its predecessors, and all these predecessors can be defined without reference to any successor.

I have attempted, primarily, to use the former approach. However, instead of the intended hierarchical relation, occasionally there is a *heterarchic* relation. This occurs when some of the subsequent relatants are at the same time logical predecessors to some of their own antecedents. These inconsistencies in the order of presentation suggest that it might be necessary to simultaneously use the two approaches, and, confusing as it is, even the impossibility of respecting the dual approaches simultaneously.

This is the case for such concepts as *knowledge*, *meaning*, and *science*. In our realistic (and maybe seemingly naïve realistic) initial presentation, these matters are supposed to be veridical reflections of ontological facts. From this realistic position, presenting them according to the subject matter to which they refer is no offence. However, from a critical epistemological, language philosophical and meta-scientific point of view, I am starting my discourse on ontological matters *already presupposing the existence of knowledge, meaning and science*.

They are, from this point of view, *logically prior to their content*. By dedicating a specific chapter to these matters of discourse, however, I hope to demonstrate or at least to present a few meaningful arguments for the very meta-principle that links the two apparently contradictory approaches together. This meta-principle is the necessary unity of the *genetic* direction from the object field to theoretical field and the *logical* direction the other way. I call this principle of directional unity the *principle of reflexivity*, and suggest it is an important feature of anthropology itself.

### 3.1 Anthropogony – the Content of the Anthropological Sublation

When comparing the anthropological object field to the biological object field, where it has its origin, there is a major genetic leap, the **anthropogonic** leap. In fact, the main purpose of the preceding chapter was to determine the exact nature of this leap. This leap can be summarised in the following scheme:

### Aspects of the Anthropogenic Leap

Aspect of the Object Field	Biological Object Field	Anthropological Object Field
minor object	organism	human individual
major object	specific species	human society/ species
context	eco-niche	societal system
minor evolution	ontogenesis	personal development
major history	phylogenesis	cultural evolution
modus operandi	functionality	intentionality
activity form	non-conscious	conscious
external side	ecological impact	production
internal side	adaptation/learning	appropriation
communication mediated by	information (signal based)	meaning

It should be noted that this table illustrates the *innovations* of the anthropological field in the form of *sublation*. Thus, they should not be conceived of as total metamorphic transformations. For example, the innovation of *conscious activity* does not imply that non-conscious activity is completely absent for human beings, the true content of the concept being the other way round, that conscious activity is literally completely absent for non-human beings.

In chapter 2, I introduced most, but not all, of these aspects of the anthropogenic leap. Before delving deeper into these anthropological characteristics and their relation to their respective predecessors, however, I will briefly describe some basic problems plaguing the anthropological discipline into which we have embarked.

## 3.2 Methodological Problems in Developing an Anthropology

As a prolegomenon to the following discussion of the content of anthropology, I will present some of the important issues that can be characterised as methodological problems.

The first of them concerns the problem of anthropogenic theories, that is, theories of the causes of anthropogony.

The second issue concerns the concept of culture. Can we really use this term as a well-defined universal concept? And, if so, are we then presuming the existence of an anthropological universal?

The next issue concerns the relation between anthropogenesis, understood as the evolution of our species, and the cultural evolution that predominantly has happened after the former phylogenetic evolution. Finally, the three objects of the anthropological object field are presented: the *human species*, the *human individual* and the *human society*.

### 3.2.1 The Problem of Anthropogenic Theories

In an earlier description of the cosmological and the biological object fields, the origin and the essential modus operandi of the fields were stressed. Presently, I will address the modus operandi, but will not address the origin of the object field. Anthropological palaeontology is still rather shaky. Further, theories of the evolution of human characteristics, consciousness and culture are so speculative that I judge them to be, in themselves, too weak a foundation for an empirically oriented anthropological theory.<sup>3</sup> Thus, attempts to formulate anthropogenic theories have resulted in little more than contributions to speculative theories of the ascent of humankind. If we accept that there is no confirmed knowledge about the origin of our species, what can we do to determine, or at least start, a discussion about the basics of an anthropological theory?

I suggest that instead we must to rely on a comparative method. This comparative anthropology is really a method consisting of two approaches, a negative approach and a positive approach. In the *negative*, we use *comparative ethology* to delineate human characteristics in relation to non-human species. In the *positive*, we use *comparative cultural and historical anthropology* to look for anthropological invariance governing the culture<sup>4</sup> of any known

human society. For both of these types of comparisons, the studies of oligo-artefactual societies are of great importance. Later, I will defend the theory of cultural evolution, according to which the hunter and gatherer culture is actually the first in a succession of cultures.

Nevertheless, in the early history of anthropology, a grave error was made when the findings from the study of existing hunter and gatherer cultures (even those supposed to be the least influenced by other cultures) were considered direct evidence regarding the nature of our ancestors' original culture.

This original culture was no doubt of the hunter and gatherer kind. However, even if it was categorically similar to the hunter and gatherer of today (and very likely in a short time only of yesterday), we cannot identify the original or primitive hunter and gatherer culture with the specific contemporary cultures of that form.

Any culture existing today has undergone an evolution of cultural history, and it demonstrates by its own survival that it has great sophistication in the transformation of a certain geographical area with a specific ecology into a specific human society with a specific culture.

The assessment of people living in a hunter and gatherer culture as biologically or culturally primitive is a social-Darwinistic expression of racism, and even the evolutionary scheme that I use is rejected and considered by many researchers to be prejudiced. My special interest in contemporary or archaeological studies of hunter and gatherer cultures, however, is not based on the conception that the members of these groups are *people of nature* or that their activities are directly identifiable with that of our primitive ancestors.

The point is to not regard these cultures as historical fossils, for they have certainly passed through an evolution for a period, exactly as long as the so-called developed cultures. Nevertheless, I do regard hunter and gatherer cultures as examples of that which is basic to the very concept of culture. They are definitely simpler to analyse than my own culture with its more complicated technology, organisational structure and meaning system. This implies a challenge for any anthropological generalisation. The anthropological invariants must apply to both those cultures that are dramatically very remote from our own, as well as to the historical cultures with which we are familiar.

Nevertheless, I am willing to risk my anthropological neck by expressing the conviction that the existing hunter and gatherer cultures, in terms of their basic aspects, are rather similar to the original cultures of the first human beings. This

personal belief, plausible or implausible, will not be on trial, for it has no importance for the analyses that follow. Further, there is also the theoretical clause built into the former statement that, as it is, we have no evidence of what these basic aspects are.

We shall return to this question of cultural evolution shortly, but before that, we have to scrutinise the fundamental issue concerning the very concept of culture.

### 3.2.2 The Status of Culture – Absolute or Relative

The study of culture has been characterised by a struggle between cultural absolutism and cultural relativism. The absolutists assert that there is a basic definition of culture suitable for any past or contemporary society, indicating that all cultures are basically identical. The relativists maintain, on the other hand, that a culture defines its own content, and that different cultures, therefore, have only rather vacuous traits in common.

The founding father of anthropology, Edward B. Tylor, states that human culture is pervaded by “uniformity”, “due to uniform action of uniform causes”. He also discusses “the general likeness of human nature” and “the general likeness in the circumstances of life”.<sup>8</sup>

Tylor’s point of view was the social-Darwinistic evolutionism of the colonial epoch. This ethnocentric and, to a certain degree, racist perspective was strongly rejected when Boas<sup>9</sup>, in the end of the 19th century, founded American anthropology based on a strict relativistic methodology. According to this methodology, any culture should be understood from within, not judged by external standards. This view was spread very successfully by his pupils Benedict<sup>7</sup> and Mead<sup>8</sup> in the mid-war period. The contribution of these two outstanding anthropologists was a specific theoretical direction called *culture and personality*, which investigated the way culture shapes personality. A parallel contemporary study of this kind was Malinowsky’s analysis of the standing of the Oedipus complex among the Trobrianders in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup>

The so-called *Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis* is an extreme example of cultural relativism. It is based on studies of the Hopi language and culture, which were asserted to lack any trace of such a celebrated category as time.<sup>10</sup> This hypothesis will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter on meaning. Cultural relativism is probably still the predominant conception among contemporary anthropology.



However, Activity Theory attempts to sublimate these two opposing positions. Accordingly, we have to study a specific culture without a fixed-theoretical manual and the methodology of our fieldwork has to be characterised by the absence of ethnocentrism or related theoretical prejudices. According to Activity Theory, there are some trans-cultural and trans-historical anthropological invariants, common for all cultures, and therefore constituting the object of a general theory of culture. These *anthropological universals*<sup>41</sup> or *invariants* are the content of a science of anthropology. Consequently, the existence and the specific nature of these invariants are the subject matter of this chapter.

### 3.2.3 Anthropogenesis and Cultural Evolution

The evolutionary perspective in Activity Theory is engraved in its anthropology via two consecutive genealogical dimensions:

#### Two Consecutive Genealogical Dimensions

- I. The psychogenetic dimension of biogenesis ending with anthropogony
- II. The sociogenetic dimension which is the evolution of culture

In chapter 2, I discussed criticisms of evolutionist thinking in relation to the dimension of psychogenesis. A similar objection has been raised against the sociogenetic theory of cultural evolution. In a later chapter, I return to this issue in more detail, but now I will sketch an argument for such a conception of cultural evolution. The discussion about cultural evolution has been largely an intense argument between, on the one side, the reductionistic or even social-Darwinistic evolutionists and, on the other side, the anti-evolutionary cultural relativists. I have already suggested that Activity Theory promotes something quite different, a third possibility.

Parallel to my argument for the exceptional status of the human species regarding the psychogenetic problem, I shall now defend a perspective that is not only *anthropocentric*, but also apparently even *ethnocentric*, by suggesting that our own culture is categorically most advanced. Here, I use the reality principle that I introduced in the preceding chapter. Advocates for the suppressed and often mortally threatened people who are adhering to forms of culture that are extremely at variance to the now globally dominating industrial culture may reject the postulate of a cultural hierarchy, accusing it of being ethnocentric, repressive and even racist. Regrettably, this allegation will very often be right. On the other hand, the relativistic cultural advocacy is, to my judgment, itself one-sided and therefore partly blind.

It is a historical fact that there has been a kind of Darwinistic cultural evolution, with the following major stages:

### **The Major Stages of Cultural Evolution**

1. the Hunter and Gatherer Culture
2. the Neolithic Agriculture
3. the High Culture of the Bronze Age
4. the Culture of the Iron Age
5. the Industrial Culture
6. the Information Technology Culture

This structure suggests to me a clear empirical thesis, the content of which is:

## The Empirical Content of Cultural Evolution

- A. The stages are defined in a chronology by their time of sociogenetic origin (entrance time)
- B. Between the consecutive entrance times, there are the successive epochs
- C. The extension of a culture form will be increasing during its specific epoch, and then tend to be decreasing afterward.

This is a purely empirical hypothesis<sup>12</sup>, but I will not hesitate to suggest a theoretical explanation.

The level of a cultural form neither is an inexplicable empirical fact, nor is it adequately explained by a black-box statement concerning the evident "natural selection" of cultures of a higher order relative to lower orders. Actually, there is an ordered relation of cultural content, a hierarchy of cultural elevation, just like in psychogenesis. In this hierarchy, a higher culture contains all the categorical constituents<sup>13</sup> of a lower culture, whereas the inverse relation is not true.

Thus, all cultures have *social cooperation, tools and oral language*. All forms of culture beginning with the culture of the Bronze Age have division of labour, an apparatus of state, a script system (written language) and an accumulation of written knowledge. From the Iron Age onwards, there is commerce (i.e., economic transaction through money). Two new cultural features originated with the industrial culture, namely *machines* (including the kinds of tools that operate by themselves) and an autonomous *institution of knowledge*, that is, empirical or real science.

The process of cultural evolution will not be discussed here, but it will be the topic of a later chapter on culture.

The focus of this chapter is not on evolution, but on anthropological invariants, the traits common to all cultures, which include the following:

## The Anthropological Invariants

1. Tools (material production)
2. Meaning ("ideal" or cognitive production)
3. Cooperation (of human activity)
4. Appropriation of culture (education)

### 3.2.4 The Human Species, the Human Individuals and the Human Societies

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, anthropology has two different kinds of issues. Its minor kind of issue is the human individual, the person, whereas the major kind is the human species or the human society (depending on whether we talk phylogenesis or sociogenesis). As we shall see in due time, this double-sidedness of anthropology implies that there must be two separate sciences studying the specific issues. Psychology has the human individuals as its particular object field. The special object field of sociology (in a very broad, not standard sense) is the human society.

Here, we are still in an ontological mode, as this chapter is just an elaboration of the previous chapter about ontology. The chapter on anthropological science will focus on the disciplines of this scientific domain and the different object fields each of these disciplines has as their issue. Nevertheless, the distinction between the ontological discourse and the scientific one, however necessary in principle, has to be relaxed when we are analysing the very essentialities of these objects fields. I therefore have to anticipate the outlines of the subsequent scientific theory.

In the current chapter, we will examine the general anthropological object field containing the totality of phenomena, objects and essentialities concerning the species of man. I suggest that this total field is subdivided into two sub-fields. First is the psychological field including the human individuals with their associated phenomena and essentialities. The second sub-field is the sociological field, referring to societies with their specific phenomena and essentialities.

Thus, the term **anthropological** refers to the *specificities* (species-related characteristics) of Humankind. The word **sociological** signifies matters concerning human societies. Finally, the expression **psychological** denotes that which has to do with the human individual.

Here, only the logics of extension have been defined for the concepts. Of course, we will discuss the intension in the individual chapters treating the specific fields. Later in the present chapter, we will start to discuss the relation between the individual and the society in which he or she is living.

### 3.3 The General Form of Human Activity

When introducing anthropology at the end of chapter 2 and in the beginning of the present one, it was stressed that the essential quality of the anthropogenic leap is a transition from a *principle of functionality* to a *principle of (conscious) intentionality*. This intentionality is not a restricted characteristic of the specific actions of the human individual. On the contrary, the principle of intentionality is, in a somewhat paradoxical way, also a collective attribute, a quality characterising the common and coordinated activity of a social entity, a group or even a more abstract organisational system.

I define human activity in the following way:

#### A Definition of Human Activity

Human activity is the societally-formed life process realised through the actions of the individuals participating in it.

The crucial point, however, is not cooperation in the sense of several individuals participating in an activity, leading to an evidently common goal. In this sense, there is co-operation in social insects and in mammals. For instance, in the case of the latter, lions hunt in a way that involves not only a combination of parallel operations, but also a differentiated division of operations, where some animals are chasing the prey and others are catching it.<sup>14</sup>

The crucial point is rather the specific kind of cooperation that characterises humankind.

Leontiev's *differentia specifica* of human activity is the distinction between the ultimate *objective* and *motive* of the activity and the subordinate goal of the specific actions into which the activity is organised.

When a member of human collective is executing a job, he initially does so to satisfy his own needs. A batter's activity in primitive society, for instance that of participating in a common hunt, must be released by the need of food and clothing, given by the animal killed. But what is the immediate direction of his activity? That can be the goal of frightening the herd of prey and thus driving it toward other hunters lying in ambush. In this way his work is done, the other hunters take care of the rest. Of course the activity of this hunter does not satisfy his need of food or clothing. The goal toward which his process of activity is directed does coincide with the motive of his activity, these two aspects of his work are separate. Such processes, for which *motive* and *goal* do not coincide will be denoted as *actions* [Author's emphasis]. The endeavor of a batter, frightening the prey and driving it toward the hunters, is thus an action.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that Leontiev was not aware of a similar kind of hunting found in the great cats when he uses battue as his favourite example of human activity. Although there is doubt about the value of this specific activity as his master example of anthropicality, this has no bearing on his very definition of human activity.

The main point is that in the distinction between the objective of the activity and the goal of the action, the former is defined by its *mediacy*, whereas the latter is characterised by its *immediacy*. The *mediacy* of the object of an activity refers to the fact that it does not need to be *immediately* present to individuals involved.

The objective can be absent in space and/or in time, but by mediation, it will be the nucleus in the extended space of activity, in which specific actions are organised and directed towards present goals. The primary mediator representing the potentially distant object is called the *motive* of the activity.

The distinction of goal and motive can genetically (that is in their origin) be traced back to the segregation of specific operation from the previous, complicated, of several phases consisting, unitary activity. These opera-

tions, now constituting the content of the activity of the individual are changed into his autonomous action, even they are mere parts of the common, collective process of work.<sup>16</sup>

By motive, Leontiev means at the same time a cognitive and conative/motivational category. The motive is controlling the complicated web of activity by simultaneously mediating the non-present objective by pointing to it in a cognitive and in a conative/motivational way:

### **The Cognitive and Conative/ Motivational Aspects of Motives**

*the Cognitive way* – the goal understood as a means to obtain the object

*the Conative/motivational way* – the effort to realise the goal is motivated by the striving toward the object

What then is the difference between human and non-human activity, between for instance the human battue and its leonine counterpart? Well, the leonine beaters are not pursuing any specific object. What they are pursuing is a common goal through differentiated operations. It is first relevant to talk about an objective of activity as something different from the goal when the objective is non-present and therefore has to be mediated by a motive. Thus, although the lions of course are motivated to perform their activity, they have no *motive* for their cooperative hunting; a *goal* is sufficient as a motivating category.<sup>17</sup>

The specific action of the individual participant is located at the second level of the definition of human activity, which is the unit of activity directed towards a concrete goal. At first sight, there seems to be no need for a distinction between human and beast on this level. However, this is not true. The fact that human action with its direction toward a present, but subordinate goal is a way of realising a superordinate, but non-present objective, specifies a relation between the category of *action* and the category of *activity*. This relation is

simultaneously cognitive and conative/motivational. Even the specific action directed toward the present goal is in part a mediation.

Thus, mediation stays with *action* in its upward relation to the superordinate category of *activity*. In the animal case, there is no category of action and the content of the concept of activity has a quite different meaning.<sup>18</sup> The mediational position of the category action is not restricted to its superordinate relatum. In the intangibility of human activity, action is certainly defined in relation to a rather concrete goal, but even if the goal is well defined and unequivocal, the way to the goal is not necessarily so. This is true starting with the higher vertebrates, and certainly with the apes (that is, in the upper part of the perceptual stage of psychogenesis), there are proto-actions with peri-present goals controlling operations, which are chosen in accordance with the specific conditions of the setting of activity.

In human activity, however, protoactions are developed into full-fledged actions, on the one hand, mediating upwards to the superordinate, distant object of the activity, in its direction toward a present or peripresent goal, and on the other hand, mediating downward to the subordinate, immediate present conditions. In fact, the second mediation, the downward part, thus has an embryonic precedence in our phylogenetic relatives, whereas the upward mediation has none.

We shall now follow this general principle of mediation into the other areas of human activity, including tools, meaning, division of activity and appropriation.

### 3.4 Tools (Material Production)

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of human activity is the *production* and the *use of tools*. Franklin<sup>19</sup> aptly defined our species as not just *Homo Sapiens* operating with symbolic representation of reality, but also *Homo Faber*, acting on reality through tools. How does this fit into our definition of human activity?

Chimpanzees do use objects resembling tools, and some authors have actually characterised these means as true tools. For instance, the chimpanzee is a very skilful gatherer of hive-dwelling insects, such as termites.<sup>20</sup> To carry out such an endeavour, the chimpanzee has to go through some carefully chosen



operations, among which are the selection and the fitting of an adequate stick for fishing out the entomological delicacies.

It is, however, a central point in the present anthropology that it is a mistake to equate the use of such means with the human use of tools. The difference is of the same kind as found between the protoaction and the action. The ultimate object of the non-human activity cannot be more distant, in space and time, than at a peripresent location. Likewise, the utensil of the chimpanzee must be peripresent. That has some important practical consequences:

### **The Restriction of Anthropoid “Tool” Making**

1. The anthropoid means are generally disposable, for one-time-use, not for re-use.
2. The operation of choosing and fitting a means, such as a stick, can eventually be expanded (or elevated) to a protection, but not to an autonomous activity, distributed over a major period of time and involving a cooperation of several individuals.

In fact, the supplementary making of one-time-use-utensils is sublated to a fundamental characteristic of human activity, that is, the material mediation. Focusing on the eco-niche of a certain species, we can characterise this niche as either rather narrow or rather broad. The morphology and ethology can be either highly specialised or highly unspecialised. Even biology has its specialists and generalists. In the case of our species, generalism can be characterised as an ecological specialty of *Homo Sapiens*. This generalism is carried so far that it transcends the evolutionary or learning theoretical concept of adaptation. Our generalist specialty is a kind of inverse adaptation. That is, instead of the species or the individuals transforming to the environments, the human activity is directed toward a transformation of the environment to the needs and preconditions of the human beings.

Considering the morphological equipment that human individuals are given as a christening gift, this hardware supply is certainly not very impressive. Our locomotive equipment is humble indeed compared to most animals, regardless of their status as hunters or prey. Our weapons of attack or defence are of a modest calibre in comparison to the claws and teeth of other mammals. Even our input function, our senses, is really nothing to boast about. The evolution of human capabilities thus is not attached to these external units, as a computer scientist might formulate it. The full course of anthropogenetic evolution is, in a most important way, not biological, but *post-biological*.<sup>21</sup> The invention and evolution of tools is a central part of this specific anthropogenesis.

As we have seen, the anthropoid ability to select and fit sticks for insect picking runs through an ontogenetic evolution. That is, the individual chimpanzee is individually instructed and self-exercising in this activity and in this way it will be more and more capable of finding and modifying suitable sticks for termite fishing. However, there will be only little *extra-* or *supra-*individual evolution of stick quality or of stick-making capability.

I have been cautious enough to say *little* when referring to such an evolution, for in fact some embryonic cases of *pre-cultural* evolution have been observed, for instance among some Japanese monkey groups. However, just as with other proto-anthropological qualities, like proto-intentionality, proto-action and proto-tool, the phenomenon of pre-culture is indeed a *forerunner*, but not a genuine part of cultural evolution.

The tools and the tool making activities of human beings, in contrast, are characterised in a decisive way by their evolutionary nature. An evolutionary nature that, mind you, is not biological, but post-biological, cultural. The very capability of participating in such a post-biological evolution certainly must be based on a specific phylogenic dimension, as we shall discuss later in some detail. The post-biological course of tool evolution (and of meaning evolution) is thus based on a firm biological foundation.

The tools being collectively refined, accumulated and passed down constitute an important part of the anthropological specialty that is called *culture*. More specifically, the tools and the activities attached to them form the *material* culture. Shortly, we will examine the other areas of culture and in a later chapter make concepts our specific object of focus.

There is a certain dialectics in the relation between the toolmaker and the tool. The function of tool is as a mediator of the activity in which it is ultimately

used. Thus, weapons are mediators of hunting and the graving sticks are mediators of gathering. At the same time, however, activity should be considered a mediator between the tool user or maker and the tool. In making the tool, the individual is externalising his or her qualities to an external object. This object, in fact, can be seen as an *externalisation* of human activity.

### 3.4.1 The Externalisation of Human Activity

The process of externalisation as an anthropological invariant is a classic feature in the tradition leading to Activity Theory, a tradition from Fichte and Hegel to Marx, and finally to Vygotsky and Leontiev.

Fichte's basic idea of human nature was the primordial division between the I and the non-I, where the I transfers part of itself to the non-I, and through this very process is confronted with itself.

This activity of transference (*Übertragen*) happens unconsciously however. It is not visible to the I, but can only be seen as its product, and therefore it perceives the non-I as something external, independent of its own activity. Thus, the activity attached to the non-I is possible through the transference only, and the exposure (*Leiden*) of the I is only possible through externalisation ("Einäussern").<sup>22</sup>

As a pupil of Fichte, Hegel makes this externalisation a cornerstone of his anthropology in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, his seminal early work:

For the power of the individual consists in its making it [the substance] suitable, that is, that it externalizes its own Self, thus setting itself up as an objectively existing substance. Its development and its own reality is thus the realization of substance itself.<sup>23</sup>

Further, in his *Encyclopedia*:

The object can provide no resistance against this activity [of the I]. The object in question is in this way set up as subjective, since the subjectivity externalizes its own one-sidedness and becomes objective.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Marx clearly acknowledges his Hegelean debt when he made *work* the supporting pillar of his anthropology and explicitly conceptualised externalisation as a key phenomenon:

The greatness of the Hegelian phenomenology and its end result – dialectics as the moving and productive principle – is thus, that Hegel conceives Man's self-production as a process, the objectivization as opposition [*entgegenständlichung*], and as elevation of this externalization; that he thus conceive the nature of work and of the objective human being as the result of his own work.<sup>25</sup>

In Leontiev's work, the analysis of tool making is placed in an activity theoretical context:

For the human being, adaptation to the external world loses its direct, biological characteristics. The nearest and for him or her most important human objects and phenomena are not situated as an external environment, to which one has to adapt, but as something that is made ones own property, something to realize ones life.

Thus the evolution of Man's activity, in a way, transcends the limits of its own nature. This is, of course, a metaphorical expression, but it catches an important fact. Namely that tools and machines, language and science are for human beings organs of their activity – for the external as well as the internal activity, that is thinking. And it is, to a certain degree correct, that Man would lose every capability to any human activity, if deprived of these organs.<sup>26</sup>

I will call this anthropological characteristic of material externalisation **production**. Thus, the material culture is the totality of material production. One of the peculiar attributes of the anthropological object field is that it is not only an ensemble of the individuals of a certain species, it also contains the human externalisations, that is, the cultural products (of which, we have already looked at the material products).

However, there are also cultural products of a quite different type. These are the less tangible, but just as vital means or mediators that have to do with another anthropological invariant, **meaning**.

### 3.5 Meaning (Ideal Production)

We saw that human activity presupposes a chain of mediators between the ultimate objective (i.e., the superordinate reason for the activity) and the operations (i.e., is the ultimate implementation of the activity). This chain consists of the  *motive*, which Leontiev characterises as the ideal reflection or picture of the object, and the  *goals*, toward which the individual actions are directed.

*Activity* is an observable process, and the  *objective* is at least a potentially external entity or state of affairs. The  *goals*, though not necessarily directly present, are after all peri-present, and they are in principle found already in our closer evolutionary relatives. The  *motive* is the most important mediator, however, by definition it is an intangible item. If we conceive of the motive as a purely psychological phenomenon, it surely is a constituting trait in human consciousness, or specifically in the conscious intentionality of the human individual. However, intentionality, understood as a  *striving* of the individual concerned, as we shall see shortly, is only one side of the motive as a constituent of consciousness in the individual. There is also another side of motive, that is, the motive as a  *picture* of the object.

In a later section on cooperation in activity, we shall see in more detail that human activity is not an exclusively individualised process, but a collective and organised one. Therefore, the motive likewise has to be collective rather than individual. The motive cannot be a solipsistic representative in the isolated consciousness of a specific individual.

Given that the objectives, the ultimate target of human activity, cannot just be idiosyncratically represented by some specific internal mental representation, the way of representing the non-present object has to be standardised. It thus has to be  *supra-individual* and  *constant* over a considerable period. Returning to our tools from the last chapter, a necessary condition for a tool (e.g., a spear or a graving stick) to be the objective of tool making production is that the individuals involved must have an understanding of what they are doing; they need a  *motive*. Thus, the motive must possess the elusive quality of pointing or referring to the objective. As the objective of a collective activity is necessarily itself collective, the motives of the individuals must be mediators of the same objective.

This fact implies that the way of referring to an objective for any motive must be collective as well. The reference must belong to the category **meaning**,

a category that in this treatise is included in the list of primary anthropological concepts. As such, it is certainly not exclusively psychological, but a sociological category as well.

This quality of pointing to something else resembles the information attribute of the signal that was a constituting feature of the functionality principle in the biological object field. It is, however, exactly the difference between these two ways of pointing that defines the distinction between the functionality principle of the biological object field and the intentionality principle of the anthropological object field.

In our description of the category of information, there was a signal triggering a certain reaction by the release mechanism of the organism.

### The Relation Defining The Informational Reaction

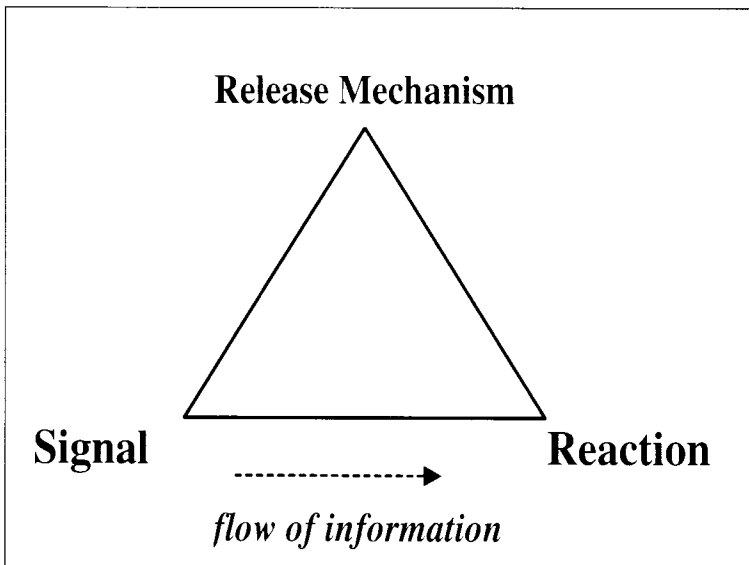


fig. 3.1

Thus, the signal is functioning as a *representative* of the source from which it has originated and about which it is a carrier of information. The sexual key-stimulus of the male three-pickled stickleback is the bulky red shape of the female abdomen containing eggs, which (at least in ethological experiments)

easily can be duplicated by using a simple, barren piece of cardboard (see Reventlow 1970). In this case, the signal is functioning as a mediator pointing to a specific biological object, namely, in the relevant ecological setting, most often a receptive female.

The cognitive relation between the signal and the biological object is a representation. I would like to emphasise that the biological object itself, generally, has no cognitive or other ethological presence for the perceiving animal. The representation is a theoretical reconstruction of the relation between the signal that is effective in the perception and the biological object that is the functional target of the reaction.

### The Relation Defining The Informational Representation

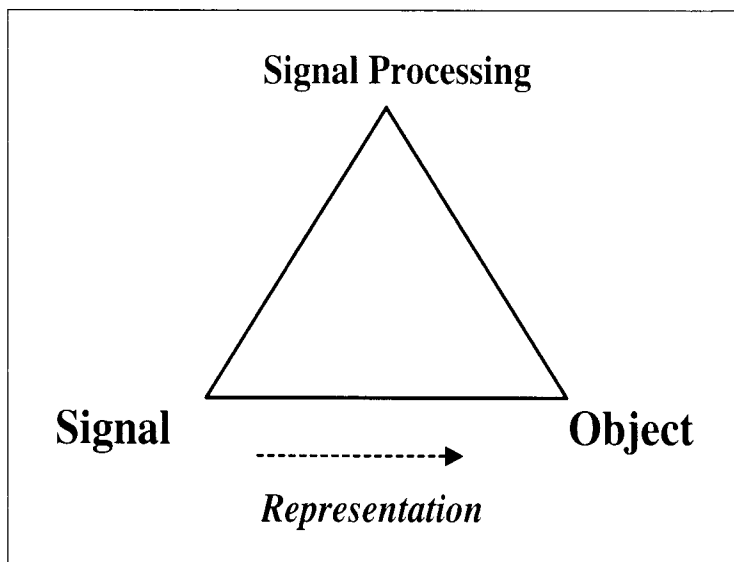
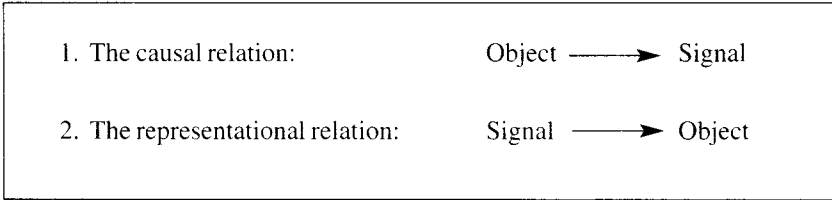


fig. 3.2

Here, we have in fact two relations between the object and the signal:

### Two Different Relations between Object and Signal



Turning to the anthropological elevation of this representational relation, we find something that structurally is very similar. Let us, as an example, use the word *antelope* as an acoustic sign uttered to some band members who have been asked to help carry a killed animal back to the settlement of a group of hunter and gatherers.

### The Relation of Reference in the Case of Meaning

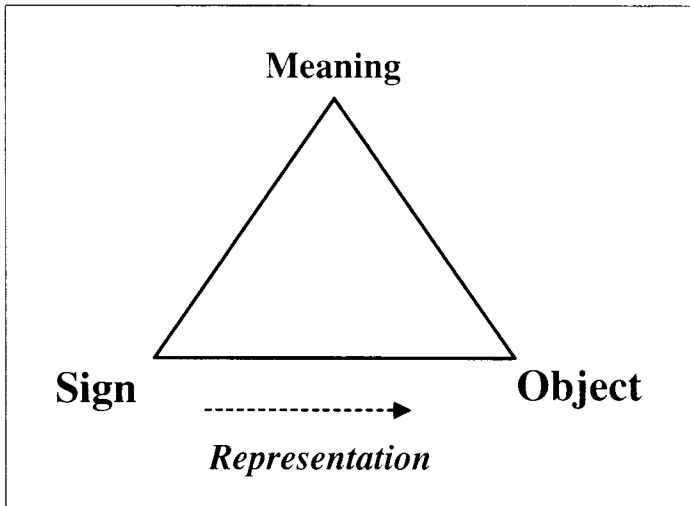


fig. 3.3



The word “antelope” is a sign referring to a non-present object and thus conveying the motive of the cooperative activity of walking into the forest to get the animal and carry it back to the settlement. What then is this seemingly occult quality of the sign called meaning?

Attempting to solve this question, I will refer back to the former anthropological invariant, that is, the tool. A specific tool, say a spear, is actually just a member of a certain class, which is simply the class of spears. This is apparently a quite circular statement. Appearances are, however, sometimes deceptive. In fact, the more precise question of what it is that constitutes the class of spears is quite tricky and certainly not properly answered in the extentionalistic way of positivistic semantics by the postulated definition of the set of all spears. On the contrary, the intension of the class of spears defines the spear-quality of the specific hunting tool, and not vice versa.

No matter whether we start with the member of a class or the class itself, we get nowhere without attacking the central problem of meaning:

What is spear-hood?

That is, what makes a spear a spear and not an arrow? Generally, we can ask as well:

What determines (specific) tool-hood?

My answer is that the determination of an object *used as a tool* is the **functionality value** of the object. The functionality value of a spear is accordingly its quality of piercing something when thrown or carried by hand against the target of piercing.

Thus, it is the functionality value, the quality of being a potential means in a certain activity that constitutes the *intension*<sup>27</sup> of a certain class of tools. What

the individual spears have in common, whatever their specific dimensions and material qualities, is exactly this functionality value through which they operate as mediators in the activity. The ability of an individual to recognise a specific function is not always sufficient, however.

As we have seen, tools are not just idiosyncratic means in the individual's actions, but parts of a collective stock. Often we have to refer to a tool that is not present or possibly not recognised as such. If a hunter breaks his spears and wants to borrow a spear from a fellow hunter, he has to refer to his need for such an artefact. That is, he has to use a word that is a sign referring to the quality of *spearhood*.

Thus, the word is a mediator constituting a relation of a hunter without a spear and a spear without a hunter. In fact, the word itself has a tool-like quality, and it works exactly because of this specific quality of mediating, of referring. This quality is *meaning*, the meaning of the word.

More precisely, we can define:

The meaning of any sign is its potential quality of referring to some object or state of affairs.

Thus, the meaning of the word "spear" is the meta-functional value of referring to the kind of objects having the functional value of being suitable for piercing.

Here we have the first example of **meaning** explained in a way that is freed from its former veil of occultism:

The meaning of a word for a certain kind of a tool is the quality of referring to the functional value of that type of object.

Or

The meaning of a word for a certain kind of a tool is the functional value of referring to a certain functional value, defining the quality of the tool.

We started, however, our analysis of meaning with another hunting story, in which the word was “antelope”. What is the meaning of this word? Now we can start re-using our definition:

The meaning of the word “antelope” is the quality of referring to a certain class of objects that is the favourite prey of the hunters to whom we are referring.

However, we encounter new troubles of circularity when we try to define this class of objects. Here, a materialistic theory of meaning has to transcend the narrow circle of word meaning. We have to conceive meaning as something that is not attached just to the word, but also the referent of the word. Just as the meaning of the word for a tool is an objective quality of some material objects (i.e., the tools), the meaning of the word “antelope” is not isolated or determined by the specific word, but by the total relation of the hunters to their prey. The meaning of not the *word* “antelope”, but the very *class* of antelopes is constituted by the activity of the hunters. The meaning of the animal *antelope* is an object of hunting.

Here we meet once more the reversibility of mediation. The meaning is a mediator for the activity, but the activity is at the same time a mediator of the meaning.

In the analysis of tools, we saw these objects as material externalisations of human activity, and we described the tool making as a material production that produced the material culture of a certain society. In the case of meaning, in the first stages of culture, these are attached primarily to a rather elusive type of sign, the words of oral language. In the evolution of the meaning system carried by oral language, however, there are many of the same qualities that characterised the material culture. Further, cultural anthropologists, in fact, do talk about the immaterial or the cognitive culture, when referring to this meaning system.

We said that tools were the externalised supplements of our meagre morphological equipment. In the same way, the meaning system can be seen as a supplement to our not meagre, but consequently parsimonious ethological equipment. In fact, the ethological equipment of a specific species is the repertoire of

behaviour that together with the morphological equipment, after the necessary adaptation and learning, will enable the animal to survive and procreate in its environment.

There is, of course, an evolutionary reason for the sparse physical and ethological equipment that we get as a christening gift. The meagreness of our morphology is a consequence of the transition from phylogenic organs to sociogenic tools.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the parsimony of our ethology is a consequence of the transition from a predefined, phylogenic repertoire of behaviour mechanisms to the internalisation of a sociogenic definition of relevant activity defined through the meaning system.

We have described meaning as a counterpart and an analogue to tools. Both meaning and tools are of a public nature; both have an objective status, in spite of the fact that the former item (at least in the stage of the exclusive oral language) does not exist in a material form.

Just as the material culture is not just a set of isolated tools, but also an inter-related system of mutually dependent artefacts and individual capabilities, meanings constitute a system that is the *cognitive culture*.<sup>29</sup> In fact, we can talk of an accumulation and transference of the meaning system. Without undue changing of the term, we can use the word **production** even about this sociogenic evolution of meaning.

I propose the following more precise definition:

### A Definition of Meaning Production

*The kind of activity that has meaning as its objective is*  
**production of meaning.**

To complete the analogy between the material production of artefacts and the non-material production of meaning, it would be tempting to talk even of this aspect of human activity as externalisation. I shall willingly surrender to this temptation.

The public meaning system is indeed external to the singular individuals, who are at a specific moment using it for a specific purpose. However, without hesitation, I admit that there is a difference between the nature of the two externalisations. The meaning system attached to the exclusively oral language is not yet substantiated in a form that is separated from its users. The oral meaning system, however public and objective, exists only through the persons who use it. The meaning system is not yet fully externalised in the way this has happened for the tool system, but this weakness is mended by cultural evolution itself.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.5.1 Tools and Meaning as Related Mediators

We have now introduced two complimentary mediators of human activity, tools and signs. In fact, these two categories of mediators are placed in a kind of circuit, consisting of the afferent and the efferent side of activity.

In chapter 2, it was stated that this circuit is already characteristic for animal activity. In contrast to human activity, animal activity is, however, fundamentally *immediate*. Animal activity<sup>31</sup> is certainly mediated by signals, and by pressing our language, we can possibly call these signals "immediate" mediation. Meaning that there are mediators, but they are working without mediators other than themselves. These immediate mediations, however, are bound to the present and to the given sensory signals. In contrast, human mediation is qualified by its mediate character: it is a full mediation, because the mediators are themselves mediated. The difference is shown in the diagrams below:

#### Non-human Activity

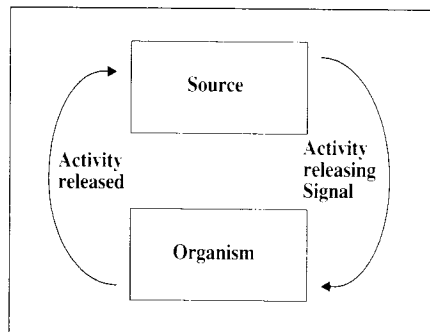


fig. 3.4

## Human Activity

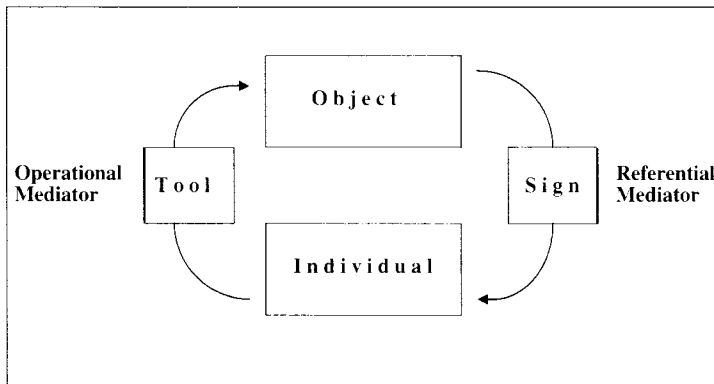


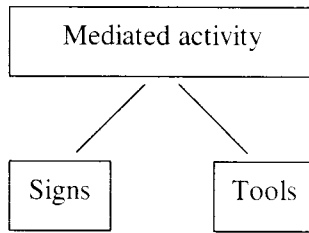
fig. 3.5

When we compare the two above diagrams, it is apparent that the mediators on both sides, the afferent signs and the efferent tools, are the bearers of, respectively, the reference (the mediated perception) and the operation (the mediated implementation of activity). Thus, the fundamental function of both mediators is psychological, which presupposes that they are internalised by the subject or subjects of the activity. At the same time, these two kinds of mediators are externalised. The tool is produced as a cultural object, whereas the oral sign is produced as a cultural phenomenon (and later the scriptural sign is produced as an object too).

Thus, we have an anthropological dialectic between internalisation and externalisation in general. (This dialectic is the object of a later section about appropriation.) In the following section, a specific aspect of this dialectic will be examined, the relation between meaning as a cultural category and consciousness as a psychological one.

This dialectic was clearly pointed out by Vygotsky, who writes:

....[T]he basic analogy between sign and tool rests on the mediating function that characterizes each of them. They may, therefore, from a psychological perspective, be subsumed under the same category. We can express the logical relationship between the use of signs and of tools using the schema in [the] figure [below], which shows each concept subsumed under the more general concept of indirect (mediated) activity.<sup>32</sup>



(Vygotsky 1978, 54).

### 3.5.2 Consciousness as the Psychological Counterpart of Meaning

In the primary stages, and even in the subsequent script-based stages, there is an intimate relation between the meaning system and the individuals who use it. We can say that public meaning is the quintessence of its psychological counterparts, the presence of meaning for the individual human being.

After having introduced the anthropological concept of *meaning* in societal or cultural context, we shall now proceed to the other aspect of meaning, its psychological content.

There is, in fact, a basic psychological presumption for the category of meaning. We have defined the functional value of meaning as its reference to something (that in the beginning is a simple object or phenomenon). The very process of reference is, however, a psychological one. Already, reference is found in the case of the proto-action of the higher vertebrate. For instance, apes can learn to operate with tokens in communication and problem solving.<sup>31</sup> Just as proto-action is only an embryonic forerunner of human action, the capability of learning token reference is merely the harbinger of the human way of referring.

The human way of referring has two presuppositions:

#### Referring

1. the externalised, public meaning system: the societal meaning system
2. the internalised, personal meaning system: the individual consciousness

## The Sociological and Psychological Aspect of Meaning

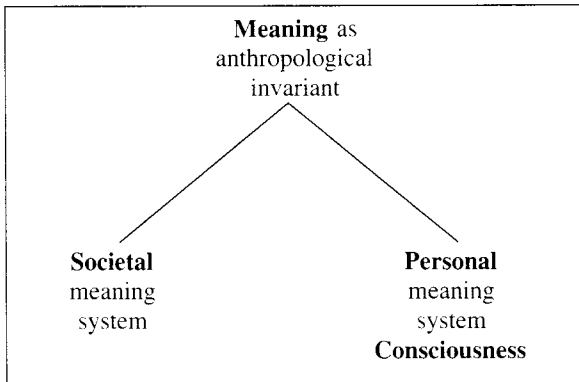


fig. 3.6

The psychological aspect of meaning can now be approached in the following definition of Consciousness:

### Consciousness

**Consciousness<sub>1</sub>** (in the sense of *quality*, i.e. of *being conscious*) is the quality of the human psyche of relating to the situation, in which a specific person is placed, especially the quality of handling meaning.

**Consciousness<sub>2</sub>** (in the sense of *momentary content*) is whatever charges of meaning a specific person has, at a specific moment.

**Consciousness<sub>3</sub>** (in the sense of *general content*) is whatever charges of meaning to which a specific person has access.



In his psychogenesis, Leontiev defines the anthropological stage as the level of consciousness. I find Leontiev's psychogenetical concepts somewhat one-sided, because he emphasises the *afferent* side of activity. In defining the successive stages of activity, he focuses on the specific form of reflection of the psyche, whereas the *efferent* or active side of activity is somewhat dim. This tendency is also evident in the anthropological stage. This stage is baptised after its afferent side, that is *consciousness*, but not after its efferent side, that is the innovation of using tool.

In my conception, however, human activity should be understood as characterised simultaneously by the **(sign) mediated consciousness** (i.e., the efferent side) and as the **(tool) mediated operationalisation**, through which the conscious motive of activity is executed.

By defining human activity not just as *conscious activity*, but also as *mediated activity*, I want to stress the many-sided multifarious character of this mediation.

This, evidently, does not imply that consciousness is unessential as a characteristic of human activity. Consciousness is certainly one of the fundamental aspects of the very mediatedness (mediacy) of human activity.

The term consciousness has been one of the obstacles of Activity Theory. In one of his seminal papers, Vygotsky<sup>22</sup> argues that the behaviouristic (and general biologicistic) tendency of psychology was actually castrating psychology by abstaining from (or even prohibiting) using the concept. How then can we introduce the concept of consciousness within a general anthropology maintaining the material and the societal facts of human life?

I will use the systematism introduced in section 3.2.4, indicating that the total field of anthropology deals with the *general specifics of Humankind*. The subfields of sociology and psychology cover, on the one hand, matters of *societies*, and on the other hand, matters concerning the *human individual*. Meaning has been introduced as an anthropological phenomenon. Its sociological aspect is **societal** (or **public**) **meaning** as a part of the specific culture of a certain society. Accordingly, consciousness is defined as the psychological counterpart to cultural meaning and thus refers to the part of the individual human psyche that is internalised meaning. I am a little hesitant to trample into the morass of defining consciousness, but a way to make sense of the term (or in our terminology to give it a *meaning*) is the following:

## A Definition of Consciousness

Consciousness is the potentiality of the individual to be involved in *mediated activity*. In particular, consciousness is the internalised competence to attach the object of the activity to the action through the motive, and the action to the operation through the specific conditions of the goal of the action. Both of these relations presuppose the capability of *referring*. Thus, one of the central functions of consciousness is the freeing of human activity from the narrowness of what is immediately present.

Consciousness is a specific way of presence found only in the human individual, a presence that always includes (either in actuality or in potentiality) a vast surrounding of the here-and-now that is the not-here and the not-now.

This psychological peculiarity, however, is not the only example of the mediation between the individual subject involved in an activity and the object of this activity. Another necessary relation in which consciousness and its societal (or in our terminology sociological) counterpart (public meaning) are involved as necessary mediators is in interpersonal relations, which are likewise a characteristic of human activity.

### 3.6 The Organisation and Division of Human Activity

In the preceding section, the mediated quality of human activity was repeatedly emphasised (possibly to the point of approaching or even exceeding the threshold of the reader's fatigue). There is, however, another characteristic of equal importance: the *collectivity* of human activity. As mentioned, sheer collectivity is also found in the activity of, for instance, the great cats. The collectivity of the human activity is more than that; it is precisely a *mediated collectivity*.

In the field study of primate activity, it is apparent that there is a limitation in the goal-setting of the apes. This limitation is not associated just with the presence or peri-presence of a potential object. It is based deeply in the motivation,

emotionality and sociality of our primate cousins. In chapter 2, the description of a chimpanzee double-crossing a stronger member of the group provided an example of the quite impressive intellect of this pongid. However, their intellect does not stretch far beyond the individualised goal. In experiments where apes have to cooperate in order to fulfil a task, their achievement is rather lousy. This possibly could be explained by their lack of a language of communication, but such an explanation is probably confusing cause and effect.

Rather, it is because of the lack of a motivational and emotional orientation toward cooperation that there has never been an evolutionary pressure toward the development of a better system of communication. In the context of the sociality that does exist in apes (i.e., the relation of domination and alliances), they actually have developed an adequate communication system, their non-verbal communication by means of facial expression and body posture.

Comparing the activity of the great cats (simple cooperation, with little means of communication) and the activity of apes (more complicated activity, but at the same time, the activity is to a large extent carried out by the solitary individual) with the activity of humans, we find in our own activity an essentially more complicated cooperation. In fact, it is a mediated cooperation or a cooperational mediation, the mediational vehicles of cooperation being tools and meaning.

Thus, the cooperational quality of human activity is not just a sharing of the process of activity, but also of the very object of the activity. Furthermore, the shared object is often so distant that it has to be mediated, just as the organisation of the activity is so complicated, involving a number of individuals over a prolonged area of time and space, that even organisation itself needs a kind of mediation.

As an example of human cooperation, let us examine the activity of a group of contemporary people living in a hunter and gatherer culture. The !Kung people of Kalahari have been studied by Lee (1979). Until recently, the !Kung people have been considered to be one of the most "primitive" groups of all living human beings. They have been called Hottentots and often categorised as a separate biological entity, as a special race with a distinct line of origin. However, these racial or ethnic (not to say racist and ethnocentric) misunderstandings are not our topic here. The point is what the activity of the !Kung people can tell us about the characteristics of human activity *per se*.

For a firm believer in the cooperative character of human activity, a cursory glance at the life of the !Kungs can be a little disappointing. The dominant activity of the males seems to be hunting. The men indeed normally go out in a hunting group, but they actually act rather in parallel, splitting up to independently chase and shoot their individual prey. They are not at all engaged in the battue, the favourite argument of Leontiev for the mediated cooperation of human activity. In fact, the !Kung men's hunting activity is apparently even less cooperative than that of the lions.

However, we have to be careful in judging the essentiality of the respective activities. The splitting up and the individuality of the hunt are necessary in the environment that contains the activity. We can hardly expect the !Kung hunters to cooperate just to verify a theory of which they have no knowledge, especially as a manifest hunting cooperation would frighten the prey out of shooting distance.<sup>36</sup>

The essential cooperativeness and, furthermore, mediatedness of the !Kung hunters, however, is apparent in the very *selection of their object of hunting*. An antelope seen many miles from the settlement<sup>37</sup> could easily be the object (specific goal) of chasing and shooting, and this action, of course, can be realised by the individual hunter. However, to be the object of the entire activity, that is the hunting, something more than the individual chasing and shooting is needed. There would be no reason at all to kill such a big animal if the motive was just an individual feast afterward. To get an adequate lunch, the hunter must diminish his effort by choosing a prey more easily caught than an antelope, with a weight of a 100 kg or even a buffalo several times as big.

To be a reasonable choice for hunting, the antelope must be the object for not just the hunter in question, but for the collective of people with whom he is living in the settlement. The antelope represents meat for not just himself, but for the whole group of maybe 20 individuals, and therefore the kill has to be carried back to village. Therefore, after the killing, the hunter returns in quiet triumph<sup>38</sup> to the settlement to gather a sufficient group of fellow hunters to carry the animal back.

Thus, granted that the specific version of Leontiev's hunting story as the crucial example of the human activity is somewhat flawed, he is *essentially* quite right. The activity of hunting is indeed an example of cooperation, an example of cooperation with a rather complicated internal organisation and mediation.

The complexity and mediation, however, is not attached to the finding, chasing and shooting part, but rather to the *carrying* part of hunting activity.

With this extended meaning of the hunting activity, the very concept of activity according to Leontiev is most beautifully demonstrated. The distinction between the objective of the activity and the goal of a subordinate action, in fact, is found when the hunter is actually leaving the result of the first part of the hunting in order to return to the settlement. The *objective of his entire activity* is certainly to take possession of the antelope or a corresponding animal, but the *goal of his action* of returning is to gather some helpers for the carrying action. We see, furthermore, that the activity of hunting is not individualised after all. In its totality, the hunting involves a number of people organised in realising its objective, and a complexity of actions, some of which have goals quite different to, and sometimes even directly opposite to, this object.

Thus, the direction of the returning action is away from the object itself. In returning, the hunter's goal of the action is to get help to carry the animal back, but his motive is to obtain the object of the activity itself.

The activity is not finished when the antelope is carried back. The prey also has to be cooked, and in the preparation of the feast, the female group is involved as well. Ultimately, the whole settlement is involved in the very purpose of the entire activity, that is the eating of the animal, or to be more specific, the feast that involves more than the mundane biological operation of eating in itself. Thus, the sharing is not limited to the effort of taking the animal into possession; it even includes the consumption of it.

This modified hunting story can be seen as somewhat male centred. Why not consider an activity in which the females take a more central role? The women of the !Kung people have two specialties as their main activity. The first is gathering fruits and roots, and the second is caring for the small children, especially the babies.

In the gathering of the vegetables, there is no need for organising the activity as a complicated cooperation, because the objects to be gathered include many smaller items. There is, however, a cooperation in gathering that corresponds to the carrying back of the hunter's prey. The result of a day's collection of fruit at some distance from the settlement often corresponds to the extent of the big game of the male hunters.

Therefore, the women have to cooperate in carrying the harvest back. As Lee points out, a part of the material culture of the hunter and gatherer type that has

been somewhat ignored is the technology of transporting back to the settlement not only the game, but also the harvest. This technology consists of *artefacts* (tools), containers or carrying devices, and the *know how* (societal meaning) of *cooperative* carrying.

Examining the second major female activity, the care of the children, and especially of the babies, we can see the very macro-structure of the total activity in the hunter and gatherers. As we have seen, there is a cooperation of activity, but no distinct division of activity (or labour to use the traditional term from the more complicated cultures) in the case of either the male hunters or the female gatherers. At the very apex of activity in its totality, however, we find a division, and not just a temporary one, but a permanent one as well. This is the division between the male and the female roles of the activities.

In organising a cooperative activity like this, the societal meaning system is necessary to mediate the individual intention and knowledge from, for instance, a successful hunter to his carrying group. This communicative mediation will be examined in the following sub-section.

### 3.6.1 Communication in Human Activity

I have now defined human activity by its intentional mediation (or mediated intentionality) and its collectivity. These double characteristics imply the necessity of *intentional communication*. To define this concept, we go back to the pre-human stage to analyse animal communication in order to find a starting point from which the human communication begins.

We saw in chapter 2 that pre-human communication is predominantly based on phylogenetic predispositions of emitting and sending signals. Animal communication thus presupposes a genetically given code. There is no great need for anything more fancy, because pre-human activity is not yet really mediational. Even among the apes, it is only the hierarchical struggle that has the imprint of a complicated inter-individual activity, and even this kind of enterprise rarely involves more than a pair of monkeys.

Human activity is, however, by its nature based on the following:

## Two Basic Preconditions for Human activity

1. A complicated *cooperation* in a culturally defined organisation
2. A *meaning system* that is likewise outside the scope of either the phylogenetic disposition or the ontogenic result of simple learning.

Thus human activity, besides its operational plane, has a meaning level as well, and the social aspect of this meaning level is human communication. Human communication is an interpersonal transfer (and sometimes even processing) of meaning. The intra-personal counterpart is cognition, that is, the individual processing of meaning.

We have now discussed three major features of our species: **tools, meaning and organisation**. These three are all constituents of culture. Culture is, however, a very fragile formation. It can disappear in just one generation if the culture is not transferred from the parents to their children. In a way, culture defines the disposition for the individuals to act in a certain way. These dispositions are not present as a birth gift in the form of a phylogenetically determined genetic set up. Instead of a baptism present, the baby has to struggle for many years, indeed for a lifetime, to *appropriate* the culture into which he or she happens to be born.

Therefore, there is even a fourth constituent of culture, and consequently a fourth anthropological invariant. This fourth anthropological invariant appears in the sociological sub-field as a sociological constituent and in the psychological sub-field as a psychological constituent. The anthropological invariant is *transmission of culture*. The sociological constituent is *education* and the psychological constituent is the child's *appropriation*.

### 3.7 Transmission of Culture (Education and Appropriation)

Marx often used the metaphor of metabolism when referring to human activity. If we take this seriously, we conceive of this self-maintaining process of humanity as a closed circle, where cultural production is the first part of the arc and cultural appropriation is the second. The production of tools, meaning and organisational structure is thus one side of activity, the aspect of externalisation, whereas appropriation is the other side, the aspect of internalisation.

This grand circuit, in fact, is attached to both kinds of anthropological objects, the sociological object (society) and the psychological one (a person). Cultural transmission is, thus, a two-level process. On the sociological level, it is a sociogenic process, an education, transmitting the totality of culture from one generation to another. On the psychological level, it is a psychogenic process, an appropriation: it is the developmental process in which the personality formation of the individual child takes place.

#### The Sociological and Psychological Aspect of Cultural Transmission

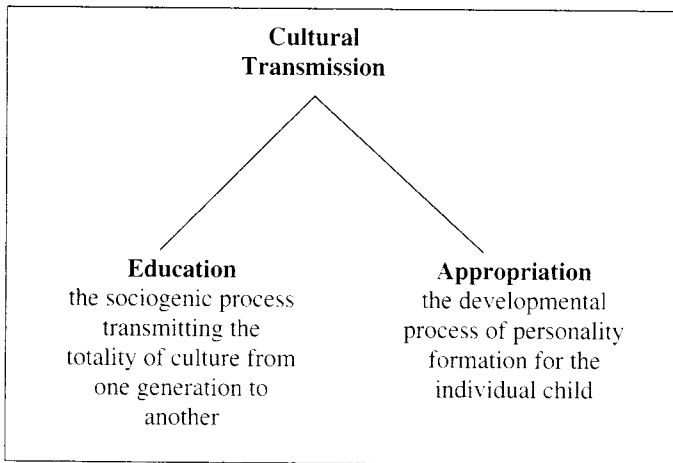


fig. 3.7



Having analysed the conceptual structure of the transmission of culture on the societal as well as the psychological level, next we examine the dynamic relations of activity of which cultural transmission is a part.

### The Constituents and Forms of Activity

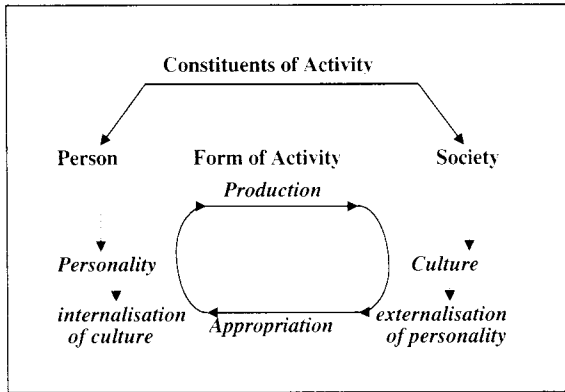


fig. 3.8

This circuit with two relatants (the constituents of activity, and two laterally reversed forms of activity as the interactive processes between these constituents) is presented in the diagram above.

From a *psychological* point of view, this is a process concerning just a specific individual, namely the autopoiesis of his or her personality. However, from a *sociological* perspective, it is a part of a supra-individual process, a societal process of transmitting man's most costly collective treasure through the individual conveyors of society. In this chapter, the supra-individual carriers of culture, i.e., tools and signs, have been stressed incessantly as major constituents of culture. They are, however, insufficient as a means of cultural transmission. Without conveyance of the long-lived culture through short-lived persons, there would be no enduring qualities of the supra-individual culture.

In this way, there is a dialectic of the *sociogenesis of culture* and the *idiogenesis of the person*. I will use the concept **idiogenesis** to refer to the psychological aspect of the ontogenesis of the human individual. The concept has been

coined<sup>39</sup> to emphasise, on the one hand, personality formation as something distinct in relation to the biological aspect of ontogenesis. On the other hand, the concept is intended to stress the radical individuality, the uniqueness of the human psyche (i.e., personality) and of the process (personality development) by which personality is formed.

The **transmission of culture** has already been noted for its curious functional duality, the dual functions being, on the one hand, personality formation and, on the other hand, inter-generational transmission of culture. There is, however, even a duality attached to the *agents* of appropriation. Just as there are two functional levels, there are likewise two agent levels, a psychological one and a sociological one. The psychological agent is the *child developing her personality* through the appropriation of the culture into which she was born. From a sociological perspective, the sociological agent is the **institution of education**, the sociological agent (or rather actant) instituted by the society in question to ensure the inter-generational transmission of culture.

This sociological institution of education only recently has been segregated as a specific sociological system dedicated to the transmission of culture. Such a specialised institution, namely the school, did not exist before the high cultures of the Bronze Age. Any culture, even the foraging type, however, has an institution of education, although this institution is generally not an autonomous one.

Thus, the family, apprenticeships<sup>40</sup> and initiation rites (with their instructors, who are most often the elder men or women) are all non-dedicated institutions of education. One of the functions (or perhaps the only function) of all of these agents of education, dedicated or not, is an activity with the objective to transmit the culture. This basic category of activity is what is covered by the concept *education*. Education may be carried out by a non-dedicated agent, but it is by definition a specific process of cultural transmission, that is, an activity having this transmission as its objective.

However, there are many other sociological processes going on that although they have objectives quite different from cultural transmission, they nevertheless are working in such a way that they have the effect of enforcing this transmission.

Thus, whenever children are witnesses to the activities of grown-ups, the former are influenced by the latter. Such activities are not only without a dedi-

cation toward cultural transmission, they are also unspecified as having an objective that is something else. These unspecified processes I call **socialisation**.

The institutions of education and the processes of **socialisation** represent, however, only one type of the sociological forces of cultural transmission, namely the side of the **forces of socialisation**. The other side represents the counterpart of socialisation, namely **appropriation**, which is attached to the child her- or himself.

### The Forces and Processes of Cultural Transmission

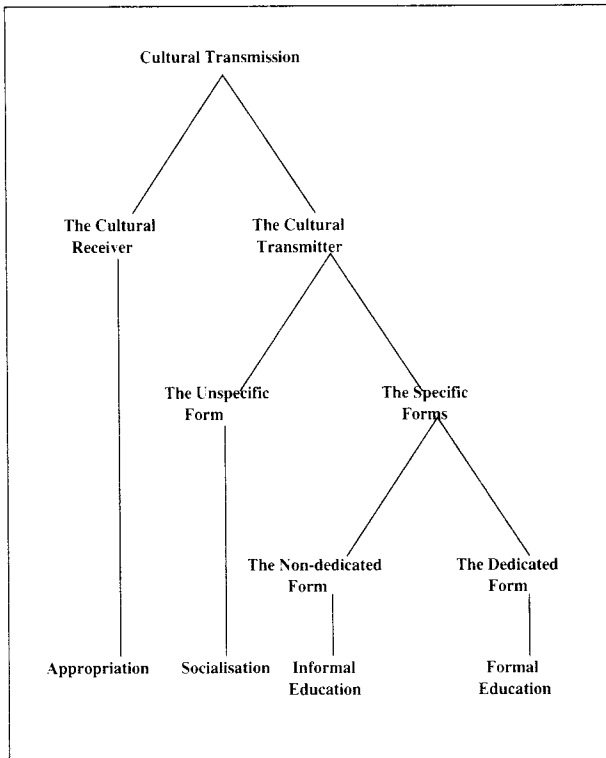


fig. 3.9

I will define **socialisation** as that process through which the child's appropriation is facilitated and modified. The term **education** is thus reserved for socialisation processes and cultural institutions dedicated to this objective.

### 3.8 The Relation between the Biological and Sociological Object Fields

We have now provided a sketch of the anthropological object field, a sketch to be elaborated upon in the following chapters. Before concluding this preamble to the study of man, however, I will introduce two of the most important issues associated with the foundation of this field. The first is the relation between *nature and culture*, between the biological and sociological in human beings. The second is the relation between the *human individual and the human collective*, and thus also between the psychological and sociological objects of the anthropological object field.

#### 3.8.1 The Relation between Phylogenesis and Sociogenesis in the Evolution of Humankind

In the anthropology advocated for in this treatise, the anthropogonic leap is characterised as a transition from the biological object field into the anthropological one. At the same time, this leap is a transition from one type of evolution to another, i.e., from the biogenesis of natural selection to the sociogenesis of cultural history.<sup>41</sup> This transition is discussed in the present section, because it is marked by a particular dialectic that can be described as a 3-stage process:

### The 3-stage process of Anthropogenesis:

1. the pre-anthropoid stage of pure phylogenesis
2. the anthropoid transition stage – the dialectics of natural and cultural evolution (culture as a self-elevating positive selection value and press of selection)
3. the anthropic stage of pure sociogenesis

These three stages are discussed in the following sections.

#### 3.8.1.1 The Pre-anthropoid Stage of Pure Phylogenesis

The biogenetic process of evolution was described earlier as an interplay of, on the one hand, the evolutionary pressure from the eco-niche of a certain species and, on the other hand, the selection value of morphological and ethological changes of the species.

The process of pure phylogenesis eventually reached a certain point in the line of evolution leading to our immediate ancestors. This evolutionary point was realised with the arrival of a species of the family Homo, possessing not only a pre-culture like that of the apes, but a real, yet rather primitive system of tools, meaning and organisation that was culturally and not genetically transmitted.

How and when this decisive anthropogonic leap came about, as already said, is still a matter of speculation. It is generally assumed among physical anthropologists that Homo Habilis was past this anthropogonic jump<sup>42</sup>, but in fact, our knowledge about the possible culture of this probable ancestor is quite meagre indeed. It is, however, of little importance whether the end of pure phylogenesis and the start of sociogenesis is to be attached to precisely the remains of a presumed species called Homo Habilis or rather to some slightly different anthropoid fossils, dated somewhat earlier. The main point is the theoretical distinction between, on the one hand, the real pre-history of man (i.e., our pure phylogenetic ancestry) and on the other hand, the real dawn of human history (i.e., the invention of culture, the means of mediated activity).

### 3.8.1.2 The Anthropoid Transition stage – the Dialectics of Natural and Cultural Evolution

In the transitional stage, there was not a dichotomy, but an interplay between the biological forces of phylogenetic evolution and the anthropological forces of cultural development. The relation between genetics and culture was thus very different from the logics found in the pre-anthropoid stage and also from the present anthropic stage (to be discussed shortly).

In both the first and the last stage, there was no real relation. This similarity between these extreme stages was, however, of a negative character, as the reasons for the lacking relation were not the same. In the pre-anthropoid stage, the missing interplay was due to the lack of cultural forces. In the anthropic stage, its cause was the termination of genetic evolution.

In the middle stage of anthropoid transition, there was, however, a vigorous interdependence between phylogenetic and cultural evolution. The relation was a circle of double-positive feedback. On the one hand, the already existing culture was at any point exercising a selection pressure on the genetic disposition for producing and appropriating culture. On the other hand, the growth in such dispositions, that is, in the mental potentialities for the development of skills and abilities, was a condition for the further evolution of culture.

Indeed, this was a glorious partnership between nature and culture. So why did such a dynamic and successful relationship ever come to an end? This question is to be answered in the section devoted to the third and final stage.

### 3.8.1.3 The Anthropic Stage of Pure Sociogenesis

Culture only exercised a selection pressure and the evolution of phylogenetic disposition for appropriating culture only represented a selection value as long as the present phylogenetics was a barrier for cultural evolution. Two changes took place as a result of evolution in the transitional stage. In fact, there was a change associated with each of the two relatants.

The maturation of the phylogenetic evolution resulted in a mental disposition of the human individual; there was no longer a need for any further improvement. In other words, the mental equipment for most human individuals became sufficient for the appropriation of any form of human culture and even for participation in the current production and cultural evolution.

Thus, culture had matured. Consequently, it became incomparably easier for changes to take place in the cultural system than in the phylogenic disposition for appropriating and modifying culture.

Actually, phylogenesis has been thoroughly defeated by cultural evolution. There are several reasons for this fact. Cultural changes are much faster than genetic ones. The system of culture is also more flexible and has a higher organisational structure than the later part of phylogenetic disposition. The system of culture is reflexive, that is, the cultural processes do sometimes have the very culture from which they originate as their target.

In a way, on the anthropological side, we could add the psychological system of personality to the sociological system of culture. All that has been said about culture could just as well have been stated regarding personality. According to the definitions of these two concepts, however, there is such an intimate interdependence between culture and personality that in unison they have to be placed as the successor of phylogenesis in the anthropological evolution. In this evolution, I have stressed the function of culture rather than personality, because what we are talking about here is sociogenesis and not idiogenesis.

### 3.8.2 Biologism and Anthropism

In the preceding chapter, I presented the discussion about the nature of life. This discussion was clarified using the struggle between mechanism and vitalism as an example, and led ultimately to a sublation of the conceptual contradiction. In the analogous discussion about the nature of human existence, a similar diatribe occurred; a struggle that broke out after Darwin's *Descent of Man*, between the adherents and opponents of evolution.

This struggle is still raging in its classical form, especially in the U.S., with the anti-evolutionists now gathering under the pseudo-scientific thesis of *creationism*. The theoretical contradiction in the conception of man is much more general and fundamental. In fact, it is at the same time echoing and supplementing the fight between mechanism and vitalism.

I have called the poles of this contradiction *biologism* and *anthropism*. Now we will meet these two antagonists.

The first pole is simultaneously a reductionism of anthropology to biology and a hypostasy of biology to the postulated validity in the anthropological object field. Anthropological biologism is a reductionist conception of human

nature; the biologist denies any specific quality of humankind that is different in principle from those found in the rest of nature.

In contrast, the second pole, *anthropism*, is an anti-biologism. *Anthropism* is not only anti-reductionistic, but, in fact, ardently opposed to the suggestion that there is any relation whatsoever between, on the one hand, *human nature* and, on the other hand, *plain nature*, thus setting a dualism. This dualism suggests that there is no correspondence between the qualities of animal species and humanity. Instead, the anthropist believes in two contrasting natures, animal nature and human nature. The social constructionist tendency in the social sciences is a clear example of this *anthropism*, and is represented by Berger and Luckmann<sup>43</sup>.

These natures are seen as oppositions. The voices of biologism are in unison, whereas there are many different versions of anthropist positions. We have already mentioned the creationists, who can be seen as a subgroup of a religious view, also called theism. Thus, theism is the pure dualism, for which Descartes was the most famous advocate. Descartes saw the immortal, nonmaterial spirit of man as the essential anthropological characteristic.

After the decline of theism and the growth of atheistic and positivistic philosophy, the heritage of dualistic anthropism, to large extent, has been transmitted in humanities and social sciences by anthropologies that often seem to not be spiritualistic at all, at least in their own self-understanding. However, they deny that we have a phylogenic nature resembling the nature of other species. On the contrary, they claim that the characteristics of any specific society are attached to this peculiar kin structure, economic system, class division, language, history or any other part of their culture.

In this sociologistic, economic, linguistic or historicist conception (regardless of the specific brand of the culturalistic conception), culture is always categorically opposed to nature. Culture in this context refers to what is unnatural, to all that we have invented ourselves, in a sublime contempt for the nature that we left long ago.

The question of absolutism or relativism is related to the antagonism between biologism and anti-biologism. In fact, absolutism is associated with the version of biologism that asserts the existence of a specific human nature that is genetically fixed. In contrast, relativism is linked to the culturalistic type of anthropism.



Just as in the former discussion on the nature of life in relation to the inanimate part of cosmos, I am an advocate of a Hegelian sublation of the contradiction between the anthropological elimination of biologicistic reductionism and the anthropological hypostasy of anti-biologistism.

Human nature, as it is empirically found in any specific human individual in any specific society, is according to this conception a complicated set up involving a combination of rather fixed phylogenetic dispositions, among which are the capability of cultural appropriation, and the result of this cultural appropriation. The best expression of this conception, according to my evaluation, is found in the theory of activity.

### 3.9 The Relation between the Human Individual and the Human Society

We have discussed the relation between phylogeny and sociogenetics, between the biological heritage and the dynamic system of culture. The other fundamental question to be introduced concerns the relation between the human individual and the human society, and whether it is tantamount to the problem concerning the relation between culture and personality.

These two relations are quite different in type. The relation between culture and personality is manifest in the relation between the *biological pre-history* and the *post-biological history* of humans, and between the biological predisposition and the psychological realisation of this predisposition through the appropriation of culture. In both cases, biology refers to the primitive preconditions and anthropology is its sophisticated continuation. This relation is rather similar to the one between the cosmological and the biological object fields. Next, we will explore the relation between the dual object fields of anthropology, a relation of a very different type.

The French Marxist philosopher Sève examines this relation in a major part of his book "Marxism and personality theory" (1978), where he coins the term *juxtastructure position* to refer to the relation. His idea is actually that personality is not something biological in relation to the non-biological society, nor is it a mere reflection or superstructure of the basic structures of society.

It is clear for two reasons in particular that the concrete individual is not a superstructure of the social relations. In the first place, while being radically functionally determined by the social *base*, *social individuality* does not occupy a superstructural position with regard to it, since it is an *integral part* of this base and its process of reproduction: the basic individual life-processes do not appear *on the basis* of social relations, they are a part of them. In the second place, social individuality itself develops within biological individuals who as such are not at all the product of the social base and its contradictions but of a quite distinct reality. Thus although they are functionally determined by the social base (and its superstructures) *quite as much* as the superstructures themselves, individuals do not arise *on this base* with superstructural characteristics but are as it were laterally *meshed in* with it and become wholly subordinated to it – although it is not their *actual source*. To designate this specific type of essential connection, which does not solely occur with individuals moreover, I suggest the term *juxtastructure*.<sup>44</sup>

It would be an exaggeration to characterise Sève's definition as lucid. He is not particularly clear in his description of personality or in the conception of its relation to society, but he is evidently an advocate for a relational and to a certain extent a processual understanding of personality. He considers personality to be an expression of the societal activities in which man is evolved, and he stresses that personality is not the sovereign originator of action, but a relatant in a dialectics in which activity is the process shaping personality. Capacities as well as needs are the result of activity, not just the causes of activity. There is considerable concordance in Sève's and Leontiev's theories of the relation between the human person and society, a point that both of these theorists have expressed (Leontiev 1983, Sève 1978).

I will provide an interpretation of this relation, departing from the concept of activity defined in the present chapter. The superordinate idea of the theoretical structure set up in this and the following chapters is that we have just one singular process, but two types of objects in the anthropological field.

The singular process is of course activity, which is not the exclusive practice of society or the separate behaviour of human individuals. Activity is by definition associated with both types of objects, as depicted in the diagram below:

### The Relation between the Human Individual and the Human Society

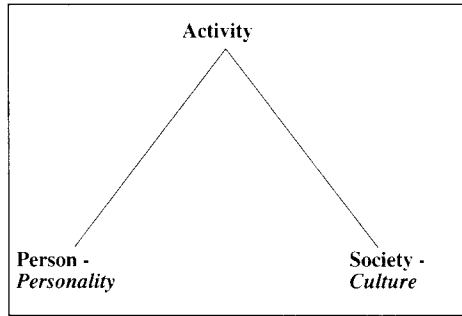


fig. 3.10

The relation between the two discriminate objects of anthropology is precisely the ruling process of this field, that is, the activity in which both objects must necessarily be simultaneously involved.

However, it would be a misunderstanding to talk about the *interplay* between the two. We cannot truthfully describe the relation as an *interaction*, in which two objects are performing under conditions characterised by a spatial relation of separation and a process of physical interaction.

### The Relation between the Human Individual and Human Society according to the Interaction Model

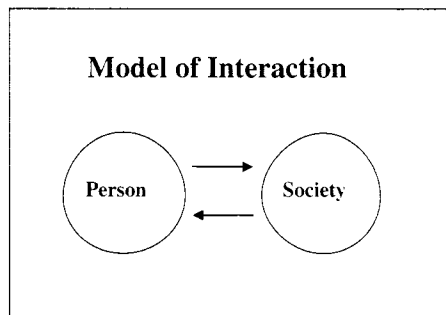


fig. 3.11

The mechanical metaphor of two collateral objects in interaction is a false model, as Sève points out. We can talk about the interaction between two persons or between two societies. The relation between person and society is, however, not collateral. The person is, in a way, a part of society, not a thing apart. The concept of interaction is therefore logically wrong. In a mereological relation<sup>45</sup>, there is hypotaxical coordination between part and whole, which is quite different from the interaction between two collateral objects.

We will analyse the idea of a simple whole-part relation shortly. However, there is another kind of connection that is often used to describe the person-society relation, namely the concept of interaction according to the interactionist social psychology of theorists like Parsons.<sup>46</sup>

### The Relation between the Human Individual and the Human Society according to the Model of Interactionism

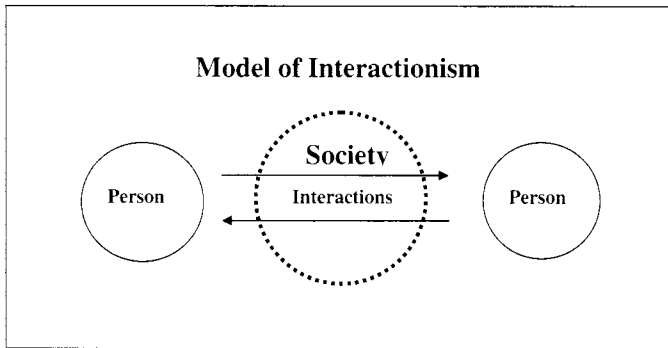


fig. 3.12

In interactionism, the interpersonal interaction is seen as the fundamental societal process, and *society* is the total system of these interactions. On the other hand, *personality* is constituted by the total system of interactions in which a specific individual is involved.

The model that conceives the relation between individual and society will be analysed as *systemic*, that is, as a relation between a component of a system and the entire system.

## The Relation between the Human Individual and the Human Society according to the Systemic Conception

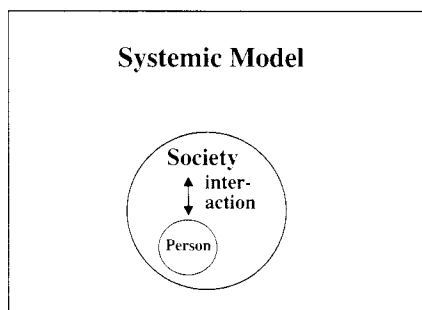


fig. 3.13

This is in a way a better description than the other models, as the human individual here appears in the form of a tiny cog in the huge machine of society. This picture is, no doubt, well suited to the experience of our personal existence in the Kafka-like web of modern or even post-modern society. The picture is, however, wrong after all. The person cannot be reduced to a societal component. Strictly speaking, the person is not at all a real sociological object.

I prefer to take the idea of Sev an juxtastructure to its logical conclusion, where we have a third possibility that in some respects has similarities to both of the previous models, and at the same time is in contradiction to both of them.

The kernel of truth in the *interaction* model is that the person has an individuality and autonomy that cannot be reduced to the logic of society. However, the falsity is that the person is not a totally independent entity, because he or she has developed and exists entirely on societal conditions.

The kernel of truth in the *system* model is that the human individual is actually a component of the part of society to which he or she belongs. The falsity of this position is, however, that the person is not just a component, but at the same time is a unique and largely autonomous individual.

I shall propagate the version of Activity Theory described above, not as a compromise, but rather as an attempted sublation of these two models.

If we take the step from the ontological discourse to the theory of science, the question is how we can understand the relation between the respective theoretical fields. This problem will be a central target for the remaining part of the

treatise. I shall, however, pre-empt my suggestion that the total domain of the anthropological disciplines can be conceived of as the mother-discipline of anthropology and the two sister disciplines, psychology and sociology. In the discipline of anthropology, we introduce the most basic concepts and assertions about our species: *activity* and its immediate sub-concepts, the concept of *anthropogenesis* consisting of the three stages described above, and two specific anthropological objects, *human persons* and *human societies*.

In preceding sections, the problems of foundation have been addressed and subsequently the respective positions in philosophy and in the relevant scientific discipline have been introduced. In the relation between the human individual and the human society, the ontological complexities are represented in the contradictions of theoretical positions. The basic contradiction is between psychologism and sociologism.

### 3.9.1 Psychologism and Sociologism

The simplest positions in the controversy about the individual and society are the two reductionistic schools, that is *psychologism* and *sociologism*. Psychologism asserts, in its most extreme form, that society is not an existing entity, but only an abstraction designating common aspects of individual life. At the dawn of sociology, this position of so-called methodological individualism was defended by Tarde (1969) in his famous discussion with his antagonist Durkheim (1966), who was defending a methodological collectivism.

Thus, the claim of methodological collectivism for the existence of sociological objects is denied by psychologism. Instead, the individual person is seen as an unconditional entity, rather unaffected by the society, which after all is not in existence. Social processes are seen as the result of psychological phenomena. Thus, Jung in his analysis of the growing Nazism in the thirties explained this phenomenon as the result of some Germanic archetypes (Jung 1970).

To be exact, it might be advisable to distinguish between an ontological and a theoretical psychologism. The ontological psychologism reduces societal entities and phenomena to psychological ones.<sup>47</sup> According to theoretical psychologism, all explanations of social phenomena are unnecessary, as the psychological explanations are asserted to be sufficient. A position of ontological psychologism implies a theoretical psychologism, but not vice versa.

The position of sociologism means, in the extreme, an ontological sociologism, or a denial of the very existence of individual persons, a stance actually taken by some structuralist. The more moderate positions of theoretical sociologism assert only that psychological theory is false or redundant, as all seemingly psychological phenomena can be explained by sociological theory.

Any hypostasy of the schools within the social sciences tends to a sociologistic position. For instance, the psychology of the Soviet was almost totally prohibited by Stalin in the thirties, when a rather sociologistic version of Marxism was the ruling ideology.<sup>48</sup>

The dichotomous choice between the dual reductionism of psychologism and sociologism, of course, has frustrated psychologist often, as well as social scientists. Especially in the mediating field of social psychology, there has been a marked aversion towards this choice. Therefore, it has been popular to avoid both extremes by accepting a dualistic position, which could be called socio-psychologism.

Socio-psychologism is interactionistic, in a way resembling metaphysical interactionism, where the dual substances of matter and mind are in a mutual relation of interaction. Thus, the individual affects society through his/her actions, and in return is influenced by the societal processes.

The position advanced in this treatise could superficially resemble such a socio-psychological interactionism. This is, however, certainly not the case. It is true that I assert the existence of separate and rather autonomic human individuals as well as a human society, and it is likewise correct that I describe activity as the relation between these two entities.

Activity, however, is not an interaction like a double feedback circle of causally interconnected objects. Whereas interaction is secondary to the qualities of the interconnected objects, activity is primary to both of its human relata. This can be stated like this:

**Interaction** is an *external* relation between the interacting objects that exist independently of the interaction.

In contrast to this:

**Activity** is an *internal* relation between the individual and society, which means that both of these objects only exist *through* this relation.<sup>49</sup>

This conception of the relation is thus a direct consequence of the definition of activity from page 213:

### The Definition of Activity

**Human activity is the societally-formed life process realised through the actions of the individuals participating in it.**

## 3.10 The Meta-scientific Relations of the Anthropological Disciplines

We shall finish this chapter with a short introduction to the meta-scientific consequences of the conception of activity just described.

The meta-scientific position corresponding to this conception can be illustrated by the diagram below:



## The Meta-scientific Relations of the Anthropological Disciplines

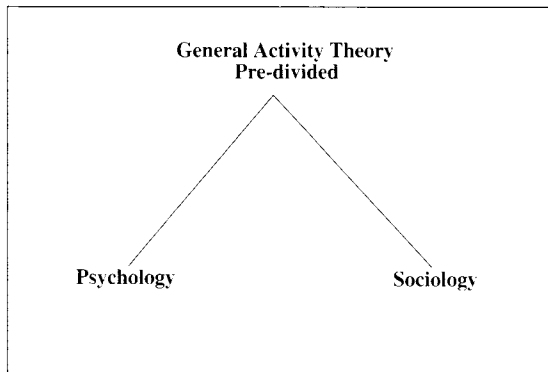


fig. 3.14

The theory field of anthropology can be divided into psychology, sociology and the general, super-ordinate *basic anthropology* that logical prior to both psychology and sociology, in virtue of consisting of the anthropological characteristics common to human individuals and human societies. This prior part is the *general theory of activity*.

It should be noted that the meta-scientific relation of theory fields between this pre-divided anthropology and the specific disciplines of psychology and sociology mirrors the object relations between activity, psychology and sociology. The super-ordinate Theory of Activity contains the basic definitions and theses of the anthropological theory field. This content is common for psychology and sociology. Actually, most of this chapter has been precisely dedicated to this super-ordinate theory. In a way, it is a discipline that can be called philosophical anthropology, but I will avoid defining it as philosophy and rather conceive of it as the most general part of the science of anthropology.

These issues will be thoroughly explored in the later chapters that cover these disciplines.

In the following chapters, however, we will make an excursion into some philosophical areas that have to be clarified before we can present an activity theoretical exposition of the anthropological disciplines. In academic discourse, it is not enough to know *what we are talking about*; we should also

know *what we are saying*. Therefore, the next chapters will cover problems of knowledge, meaning and science.

## Notes

- 1 The reader should bear in mind that I am using the term biological here to refer to all non-human organisms.
- 2 Psychology is referring to human psychology, not comparative psychology, both here and in the remainder of this treatise.
- 3 Such speculative and certainly stimulating theories are found in Leontiev (1973) Lovejoy (1981) and Engelsted (1984).
- 4 It should be noted that the term "culture" has two rather different denotations, a broad one and a narrow one. In the broad sense used in this treatise, culture signifies human activities and all that is produced by them. In the narrow sense, culture stands for those activities and those products that have no direct practical aim, but are either of value in themselves or as a symbolic expression of such values. Weber (1964), for instance, distinguishes between the rationality of a goal and the rationality of value. The narrow definition of *culture* is associated with value rationality. A revealing trait of our society, no doubt, is that generally we make a distinction between the *useful, instrumental* part, the basic part (i.e., activities and products *outside culture*, such as technology, economics and politics) and *culture* itself, the icing on the cake (i.e., something without actual use, but nice to have or to exhibit).
- 5 Here quoted from (Brown 1991, p. 54).
- 6 (Boas 1984).
- 7 (Benedict 1934).
- 8 (Mead 1928, 1935).
- 9 (Malinowsky 1961).
- 10 (Whorf 1956).
- 11 Brown (1991) is an excellent exponent for a modern universalism, by demonstrating the falsity of the claims of the relativists, searching for anthropological universals, and denying neither the specificity of the individual cultures nor the necessity of studying them from an internal perspective.
- 12 The verdict that the thesis is empirical is formulated in accordance with the Popper's philosophy of science. Empirical is, however, not to be understood as experimental, as Popper preferred, but to be evaluated.
- 13 The categorical constituents are all the deciding characteristics of a culture, such as the form of its meaning system, tool system and organisation system.
- 14 (Peters & Mech 1975).

- 15 (Leontiev 1973, p. 168).
- 16 (ibid.).
- 17 Poulsen (1993) has developed a theory of conation built on this distinction between simple motivation and the possession of a conscious motive.
- 18 Leontiev writes: "For the animals, the object and the motive of activity – as we have already pointed out – are always amalgamated and coinciding." (ibid).
- 19 The use and fabrication of instruments of labour, although existing in the germ among certain species of animals, is specifically characteristic of the human labour-process, and Franklin therefore defines man as a tool-making animal (Marx 1996, part 3, chapter 7).
- 20 (Passingham 1982, 153ff).
- 21 However, it should be kept in mind that a major morphological change is a biological presupposition for this post-biological development, this change being the quantitative and qualitative growth of the brain. This point is discussed in section 3.8.
- 22 (Fichte 1965, p. 318, author's translation).
- 23 (Hegel 1986, p. 365).
- 24 (Hegel 1975, p. 350).
- 25 (Marx 1974, p. 574).
- 26 (Leontiev & Panov 1963, p.12).
- 27 Notice the difference between intention and intension.
- 28 The general morphological and ethological parsimony, of course, is reversed regarding the brain and the potentialities associated with this organ, that is, innate dispositions that secure the appropriation of language and culture.
- 29 In contrast to *material* culture, the meaning system is sometimes called the *ideal* culture. I generally avoid this expression, because to my taste it has a somewhat dualistic flavour.
- 30 Anthropologists who do not like this evolutionary type of expression would discuss the difference between the oral and written meaning system. We will return to this issue in chapter 6.
- 31 The proto-actions are excluded here as unavoidably disturbing precursors modifying, but not defining the essentiality of animal activity.
- 32 (Vygotsky 1978, p. 54).
- 33 See (Desmond 1979).
- 34 (Vygotsky 1925). "Consciousness as problem in the psychology of Behavior" (orig. article in K.N. Kornilov (ed.) *Psikhologiya i marksizm*, Moskva (1925) *Soviet Psychology 1979*, Vol. XVII 4:3-35.
- 35 The prefixed exclamation mark in "!Kung" is not an expression of the enthusiasm of the author about this group of people, but is actually referring to a specific phoneme of their language, a so-called clicking-sound.
- 36 The shooting distance is the distance of an arrow projected from a bow.

- 37 It is of course crucial that all people, even the nomads, do have a settlement. This aspect of the living conditions is intimately related to the totality of human activity, as it will appear in the following.
- 38 The triumph actually has to be quiet, as there is a severe norm of modesty in the !Kung culture. The hunter accordingly will explain that he regrettably enough had very bad luck, just killing a miserable, little rabbit. The very fact that he is returning empty-handed shows that this story is, in fact, a pure pretension
- 39 The concept was developed in cooperation with (Rasmussen 1978).
- 40 (Lave & Wenger 1991).
- 41 Using the terminology of Critical Psychology, this transition is called "Übergangsfeld-Tier-Mensch. See (Holzkamp 1985, p. 161).
- 42 (Leaky 1981).
- 43 (Berger & Luckmann 1967).
- 44 (Sève 1978, p.144).
- 45 (See 2.7).
- 46 (Parsons & Bales 1956 and 1962).
- 47 Thus the Danish Philosopher Herbert Iversen writes,  
 I would like to know, what of human origin at a certain time at a certain location on Earth can be traced beside, *beneath and behind specific, individual living human beings*: Peter and Petrine, Thomas and Mary, Ivan and Sonja, Abdul Khan and Chingo-puh etc., etc. (at the time being, all together 1 ½ billion) – and their different, specific small manifestations of life, "material" and "spiritual" – and in supplement, if you want, the products of these persons and of deceased persons, such as houses, ships, cars, furniture, clothes, books, pieces of art.  
 .... Perhaps I can find it in an old glass chest in a basement, or some old meticulous goldsmith work called a crown, a sceptre or the like or some old parchment sheets with flourishing writing and with sealing wax, or on a loft, a coloured flag with sewn figures and fabulous monsters to be hoisted up on a bar certain mornings and left there to be aired until dark. I ask, of any these pieces of handicraft or industry inside certain houses, which is the state? If none, I am afraid that such a "state" is not at all to be procured, neither on Wilhelmstrasse, Whitehall or any other street or city or any other specific geographical location on this Earth.  
 .... Neither the Prussian, the English or any other state can thus be found. They do not exist. (Iversen 1918, p. 249-51). [Author's translation from Danish.]
- 48 In 1936, the central comity of the Soviet Union passed a resolution with the title "On the Pedagogical Distortions in the System of People's Commissariat of Education" (Petrovsky 1990, 252ff). Pedology was an eclectic discipline intending the integration of physiology, psychology and pedagogy into an integrated science on child development, and its ban was in itself no great loss for science. It was, however, a deadly poisoning of academic freedom. A great part of psychology, such as the writings of Vygotsky, was in fact blacklisted as pedagogical distortions. Whatever the political and ideological motives for the pedology ban, it represented in my view a sociological tendency in the Stalinist version of vulgar Marxism.
- 49 Østerberg (1972) suggested distinguishing between external and internal relations. The first kind denotes those relations between two entities that can disap-

pear without an annihilation of the entity, or a total change in its essence. The second kind denotes those relations that are basic to existence or essence. The concept of an internal relation is inspired by Marx's analysis of the *internal contradictions* in the formation of capitalism (Marx 1974).