Some introductory remarks

Let me start with a surprising – or should I say: depressing? – experience. When preparing this lecture I was curious about the newest informations about the main terms of its title. So I asked wikipedia for “cultural-historical psychology”. The information was: “cultural-historical psychology – also called the school of Vygotsky, sociocultural psychology, sociohistorical psychology, activity theory, cultural psychology, cultural historical activity theory and social development theory”. And when I asked wikipedia more precisely for “activity theory” in particular I got the information: “Activity theory is an umbrella term for a line of eclectic social sciences theories and research.” We all know the very common abbreviation CHAT not only from the ISCAR congresses but also from a broad international reception and discussion of cultural historical psychology. But when I asked wikipedia for “CHAT” I got the answer: “To chat is to talk about ordinary things that are not very important.” When I repeated my question this time using a psychological dictionary the answer was: “CHAT means Checklist for Autism with Toddlers”.

This experience make you think. Could it be possibly just a problem of wikipedia only? In the meantime I am increasingly convinced that these findings are maybe typical or perhaps even symptomatic of the common reception and understanding of activity theory. In any case, when you read the contributions of the ISCAR congresses you very often meet the following situation:

Many of the presented research projects are tied together with Leontiev’s name but are quite obviously based on behavioristic, constructivist cognitivist or culturological theories which all are by no means in accordance with Leontiev’s activity approach but are in strict, even gruff contradiction to his fundamental theoretical assumptions. On the other hand there are increasingly projects which – using CHAT as a label of legitimizing their investigation – in doing so scarcely cover the fact that they use the famous triangle of Engeström only at the lowest level of methodological knowledge, that is the level of formal procedures and techniques – thus ignoring the fact that procedures and techniques as a rule are dependent on theoretical and methodological assumptions and are not naturally in agreement with CHAT whatever this means in particular. The confusion cannot be worse.

Recalling what Leontiev wrote in 1977 – that is 35 years ago – it seems to be like a concrete review of the state of the arts diagnosing a contradiction between an increasing amount of facts collected by researchers on the one hand and the rather miserable state of their theoretical and methodological foundation on the other. For a causality Leontiev then held responsible an unconcern with a general theory of psychology, a certain methodological carelessness concerning data fetishism and a kind of sloppiness and exaggeration concerning
the importance of methods, procedures and techniques which could be called a 
dismethodologisation. Today, insisting upon a clear and consistent theoretical basis seems to 
be “old school”, and to look for a vague kind of viability or connectability seems to be state of 
the art.

Besides all of the other focal points of his work Leontiev tackled with these appearances of 
deficiency of the contemporary psychological lines in general and with the methodological 
meaning of activity in particular not only within his last book on “Activity. Consciousness. 
Personality” but throughout his whole life. He regards the reported deficits as a threefold 
problem of failure of methodological reasoning concerning:

1. clear philosophical orientation and methodological control,
2. precise elaboration of the specific methodological problems of psychology as a 
specific discipline,
3. explicit reasoning of the ideological function of psychology. We are fully aware of the 
fact, “that in our world today psychology has an important ideological function […], 
and that it is impossible not to take this into consideration.” (Preface, 2012, 19)

I would like to present to you my following interpretation of Leontiev’s main arguments, 
dealing with the two first problem complexes of Leontiev’s omitting Leontiev’s third 
complex. This is why I think that the ideological function of activity theory is of enormous 
impact on its present day reception and therefore needs a special contribution of its own. Thus 
my two theses are:

1. Activity theory is a methodology.
2. The core of what is called „cultural historical school“ is its methodology.

I. Thesis:
Activity theory is a methodology.

This thesis intends a clear demarcation from common phraseology.
To start with what is quite obvious: Leontiev is – neither in general nor in particular - 
aiming at a concrete description or an analysis of the contemporary Russian adult’s psyche or 
psychical development. He does not even attempt doing it. In other words:

• AT is not a psychology in itself but a proposal or perhaps an instruction of how to do 
psychology right, that is a “critic of psychology” (Vygotsky, I, 253) – not to confuse with 
critical psychology – following Jaroszewskij I should better say: a “critic of psychological 
reason” (Jaroszewskij/Gurgenidse, 413) in the methodological sense of Kant or in the sense 
of Marx’ “Critic of political economy” (see Schürmann 1995, 16ff).
• AT is not an affirmation of one or another concrete psychological approach or conception 
or tendency but a quest for a method of elaboration of a clear, consistent, and reflected 
theoretical position in psychology, a quest for a method of theory formation.
• AT is not a psychological analysis of a general activity but the activity oriented analysis 
of psychology’s system of notions in order to find out basic psychological concepts which 
represent its fundamental philosophical assumptions as e.g. reflection and human activity 
being an inseparable unity.

In other words, to Leontiev it is not about completion or addition but total conversion or 
reconstruction of the entire conceptional system of psychology.
So, what is precisely meant with my thesis?
1. It seems to be rather more adequate to speak of AT as a philosophy of psychology or perhaps a philosophical psychology like AAL and DAL do giving that title to their collection of all of Leontiev’s relevant contributions on activity as a basic category. But philosophy of psychology to Leontiev means

- to think about the understanding of nature in general and the nature of human beings in particular,
- to reason about consciousness, its nature and its relation to the material reality,
- to understand that mind and matter are just different forms of a homogeneous and inseparable nature, and that putting them into an absolute contrast would be a flagrant or in Leontiev’s words a “screaming untruth” (Leontiev, II, 442),
- to accept that – although objective reality is basic and primary while consciousness is secondary – consciousness is not a closed box, but consciousness and reality are a unity of contradictions which pass into one another. “Consciousness and the reflected reality are tied together by real processes rich in substance resulting in transmission and transformation of the material into the ideal, of objective reality into facts of consciousness and vice versa of facts of consciousness, of ideas into reality.” (ibid.)
- to take into consideration that nature as well as reflection of the world are moving processes of emerging and dissolving contradictions, that is that consciousness is a product of the development of matter, product of the development of life. Subsequently consciousness has to be conceived as a specifically human form emerging through the historical development and the transition to the specifically human way of life, that is to life in society.
- to realize that consciousness is not the only existing, only possible, only thinkable form of psychic reflection.

All these thoughts are philosophical, they give reasons for a philosophical theory of consciousness which is basic and necessary but is quite different from a psychological theory of consciousness, more precisely: a general method of theory formation in psychology. And this exactly needs methodological reasoning. Unfortunately Leontiev never used the term methodology in the titles of his published articles concerning activity as a basic category although all of them are dealing with methodological questions.

2. At most we could call AT a “general psychology” – as Leontiev himself does it in his “Lectures on General Psychology” (2000). But this requires essentially to be aware of the sharp methodological distinction between – in Leontiev’s terms – “general scientific theory” and concrete or “single scientific theory”.

It will help us to recognize that especially the term of psychology as a general science had been coined by Vygotsky long since. In his famous article on methodology titled “The crisis of psychology in its historical meaning” with the subtitle “A methodological study” written in 1927 he pointed out:

“General science is the theory of the ultimate foundations, of the general principles and problems of the respective science area, and therefore its objects and methods of investigation, its criteria and its tasks are other than those of the special disciplines.” (Vygotsky, I, 85)

Similar to concrete sciences which within their respective limits perform the function of a funnel condensing facts by rules to laws and laws by theories to hypotheses, so general science does the same work with same procedures and same goals for several concrete disciplines.” (ibid., 97)
“The decisive and so to speak higher function of general science is not based on its position above every other sciences, it does not come from above, as to say from the original basics of scientific knowledge, but from below, that is from the sciences themselves which delegate the confirmation of truth to general science. Therefore the general science emerges from its specific function with regard to the concrete sciences. General science accumulates their sovereignties and is their representative. If we conceive the scientific system as a circle comprising every special discipline of psychology, then general science corresponds to the centre.“ (ibid., 104)

“All this shows us, that it is impossible to define the term general science in an absolute way but only with regard to the respective concrete scientific discipline.” (ibid., 99)

And with regard to psychology Vygotsky states:

“General psychology analyses how a theoretical psychology comes off and how the structure and efficiency of its concepts are about” So “the problem of theory formation in psychology is the basic problem of general psychology”. (ibid., 65-66) For this purpose a methodology is needed: “According to a correct statement methodology is the lever to help philosophy move science. Any attempt to bring science forward without methodology, to apply power directly without lever … makes science impossible.” On the other hand: “[To advance a thesis I argue:] The analysis of the crisis and of psychology’s structure proves unerringly that no philosophical system will be able to master psychology immediately, without a methodology, that is without a general science has been built.” (ibid., 250-251) “But the one who attempts to skip methodology in order to immediately create any psychological discipline, will inevitably jump over the horse he wanted to sit down on”( ibid., 249).

“This theory of psychological materialism, or dialectic of psychology – is what I call general psychology.”( ibid., 252)

Although Vygotsky up to 1927 did not see an existing methodology of cultural historical psychology, he saw as a result of his extensive methodological study certain objective symptoms of a tendency toward a general psychology (ibid., 182), and he was convinced: “For the moment we do not know how this methodology will be about, and whether it will come soon. But we know that psychology will not come forward as far as this methodology has not been built, and it is without any doubt that the first step forward will be a methodology”. (ibid., 256)

Two remaining questions: Does that mean general psychology and methodology being identical? If it were general psychology's proper function to distinguish between the empirical and the constituting object of psychology what is then this basic constituting object? Who is responsible for that “reasonable abstraction” in the sense of Marx resulting in a clear definition of that proper object of psychology? Unfortunately Vygotsky did not touch these issues within his crisis article.

3. This differenciation of general and concrete science of psychology was used right about the same time when Leontiev published his book “Activity. Consciousness. Personality” by the well known Russian scholar Erik G. Judin who was an expert in philosophy of science and epistemology, and who dealt explicitly with the activity approach in history of science and philosophy in general and with Leontiev’s previous works in particular. For a better

1 Unfortunately in English language there is no distinction between „object” and „predmet” in Russian or „Objekt” and „Gegenstand” in German. I try to save this very important theoretical difference using the terms „empirical object” and „constituting object”.

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understanding what “general theory” means in terms of methodology it seems to be useful to recall Judin's arguments.

Judin speaks of two types of knowledge: first, knowledge about world asking “what is?”; and second: knowledge about knowledge asking “how is?”. The result of producing knowledge about world we normally call a theory while the result of producing knowledge about the process of aiming on knowledge we call a methodology (Judin 2009, 87).

Focussing on methodology Judin distinguishes four levels of methodological knowledge and its function (ibid., 94ff):

- a philosophical level: Special object here is the system of prerequisites and explanatory principles of scientific knowledge in general like “cosmos”, “nature” or “activity”, that is of
  - world views and philosophies of life, and of
  - general forms of scientific reasoning and their historical structure of categories;
- a general scientific level: Principles and forms of general scientific research – like logic of science, systems theory, cybernetics, play theory or applied mathematics and their methods like analysis of scientific languages, modelling, formatising, idealising, and so on – which are general because of their high importance to not only one but to an increasing amount of scientific disciplines;
- a single scientific level: Explanatory principles and genuine methods of specific scientific disciplines like e.g. psychology which may possibly be differentiated and concretized according to the special tasks of parts or sections of the disciplines;
- a level of scientific practice: System of methods, techniques and procedures to guarantee solid empirical data according to the special needs of each scientific discipline.

Each level of methodological knowledge has its special function within the process of knowledge acquisition, and therefore they build a complex system of relations and interdependencies which though changes from one discipline to the other. At the same time fundamental basis and leading level to any methodological system is the philosophical knowledge. In this level and only here the scientific attitudes of scientists are formed and shaped. Only on this level the concrete historic limits of any scientific theory or method are made out and detected, and emerging transitions or shifts of disciplines or areas of scientific research are recognized. On the other hand it has to be taken into account that the philosophical principles may never be directly applied or transferred to the level of concrete scientific disciplines, because the relation between general science and concrete science is a bottom up process of generalising facts by concrete scientific disciplines and simultaneously top down processes of controlling concepts and methods by the respective general science.

As for the importance of methodology Judin stresses:

- methodology is a function which cannot be reduced to just one special level but will be realised on each level in a special form and with special goals,
- despite of the interdependency of general and concrete scientific disciplines the analysing (or descriptive) and controlling (or normative) function (Judin 2009, 94/95) of general science within the process of theory formation is not to be overestimated.
- the methodological function of general psychology belongs to the third level. As for the issue of the identity of general science and general psychology there is an internal methodological difference in terms of the extent of competency.
4. This scheme of Judin's may help us to better understand what follows:

- Each theory may realise methodological functions, and methodologies on the other hand sometimes make themselves independent as a theory. This is in particular what happens often with AT, and what makes our methodological reasoning difficult because it comes out to be a special terminological or even concept political problem. The designation of the activity methodology as a theory has been introduced to scientific discussion in order to mark the difference of the activity approach against action theory and the theory of behaviour – which makes sense under certain conditions. Nevertheless, inside the connection of theory and methodology the relation of goal and means remains all in all constant.

- Calling the activity approach a theory tends to become a kind of “ontologising methodology” (Judin 2009,102), thus confusing general science and concrete science, treating categories as real objects, and loosing any analytical as well as controlling normative importance of methodology's higher level functions.

- An other subsequence of ontologising methodology in modern human sciences with mass character is the requirement for advanced techniques of research and standardization of the research processes, especially under the conditions of mainly economic criteria in big societal projects and nowadays in university projects with psychological concern as well: The specifically orienting form and function of methodology changes thereby into a form and function of regimentation replacing the discovering power of methodology by purely organising power (ibid., 103).

- As for the methodological quality of AT as a general science of psychology – quoting Leontiev: „I try to reason out those categories which are of upmost importance to a system of psychology as a concrete science free of contradictions...“(Leontiev 2012, 24) „We will not deal with the special [psychological] features which distinguish the different socioeconomic formations“, in other words not with problems of concrete psychology, rather with „the general theory of individual consciousness“ resulting in „a complete reconstruction of the whole conceptual system of psychology“(ibid., 24) But his attempts to unevocally define the constituting object of psychology fail or change throughout the development of his work (see Sokolova 2003).

- The difficulty in grasping the methodological quality of Leontiev's understanding of AT comes from the fact that Leontiev in his works constantly changes not only between those two but between all of Judin’s four levels of methodological knowledge.

- Even worse: there seems to be a clear distinction concerning general science as a metatheory between the understanding of Vygotsky and Leontiev: To Vygotsky general science or general psychology is a generalisation of the conceptual system of all psychological special disciplines like e.g. genetic psychology or child psychology, defectology or psychopathology, pedagogical psychology or psychology of learning, psycholinguistics, psychotherapy and so on and so forth analysing and criticizing their common philosophical and methodological foundations, conceptual structure and preconditions. To Leontiev general science seems to be a generalisation of the conceptual system of every (what we call in German) „neighbouring discipline“ that is of human sciences in general comprising psychology, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, linguistics a.s.o., including their subdisciplines.

- And there seems to be another distinction between them concerning the main methodological goal of their reasoning. Vygotsky's main interest is analysis and description focussing on preconditions and subsequences of the existing psychological approaches, and formulating what in any case should be avoided in psychology. Leontiev's concern is regulation and steering or control focussing on orientating psychological
research by positively formulating the basic philosophical prerequisites, a concrete explanatory principle, new theses of rich substance on the structure of its objects, concrete proposals on adequate methods and procedures, and so on.

- Despite of these differences – they may be right or wrong – Leontiev's methodology realises quite the same function as Vygotsky's on a higher methodological level. I think that Leontiev's motive or methodological purpose was to realise what Vygotsky had in mind when he repeatedly insisted on psychology considering what „stands behind“ words or meaning or even consciousness and then referring on life, on „real historical processes“ (Vygotsky 2003, I, 253) or on a „philosophy of practice“, for „practice is what changes the whole methodology of sciences“ (I, 203). And Vygotsky stresses using his famous quotation: „The principle of interrelation of practice and philosophy is – I repeat this – the stone which had been thrown away by the workmen but became a cornerstone“ (ibid.).

- My conclusion is: Object oriented activity including its philosophical meaning is the category to represent the methodological content of what the notion of „life“ or the Vygotskian concept of „practice“ means. Anyway, there is no further argument needed to confirm: AT is a methodology. But of course, this proposition is still far from making clear what the specific constituting object of psychology is (for the differences between Rubinštejn and Leontiev or Leontiev and Gal'perin see Sokolova 1998, 2001, 2003).

II. Thesis:
The core of what is called „cultural historical school“ is its general methodology.

1. In other words, if we want to define cultural historical psychology by its real essence in order to distinguish it from every other existing modern or historical psychology – behaviorism, constructivism, cognitivism, action theory, culturology, social development theory, psychoanalysis or whatsoever – then there is solely one theoretically consistent and sufficient way to do so: that is to look for its methodology.
Methodology is the very core or kernel to distinguish the genuine cultural historical approach – irrespective of its internal differences, divergences, terminological discrepancies or verbal contradictions – from any other psychological school or tendency.
Any other criterion – like personal relations of friendship or rivalry, the relation of scholars and their disciples (the „troika“ or „pjatjorka“), their common research program or even conceptual framework, not to speak of attempts to refer on the frequency of using the term activity or other notions – is external, secondary and not decisive.
This does not mean to call such criteria completely meaningless or unimportant, but they are not of primary importance compared with methodology, because methodology – as we already saw above – directs every scientific theory formation by its orienting and controlling functions.

2. To cut down possible expectations requires some restrictions:
   • I will not prove the existence of all these criteria within the ongoing discussion of the understanding of cultural historical school nor prove their failure in details.
   • I will by no means try to repeat the concrete methodological analysis of Vygotsky's with regard of every contemporary psychological theory in order to found my thesis. This – I agree – should be done to confirm the conclusiveness of my thesis in its full range. But this would require a genius like Vygotsky was.
Although several serious scholars, like A.A. Leontiev, V.V. Davydov, M.G. Jaroshevsky, or in Germany J. Lompscher and W. Jantzen, are convinced that besides its general methodology cultural historical psychology is mainly based on the category of object oriented activity I am not sure that this assumption of activity as explanatory principle does justice to Vygotsky. But despite of Vygotsky’s ongoing search for an explanatory principle he is in harmony with Leontiev concerning their common philosophy of practice what to me is even more important.

I will therefore deal with Vygotsky's and Leontiev's general methodological foundation focussing on their harmony and difference, and hoping to meet some arguments for a justified assessment of the legitimacy of many of the psychological approaches or research projects relying on „cultural historical school“.

3. With these explanations I can specify my second thesis as follows:
Vygotsky and Leontiev use the same methodology with respect to Judin's first and second level of methodological knowledge. Or even more provoking: The most important orientation and characteristic of „cultural historical school“ is its philosophy of practice (see Rückriem 2012).

This means in particular:
• The cultural historical school of Vygotsky in a more narrow sense as well as the Char'kov school of Leontiev use the same philosophy of practice.
• The refutation of this argument requires evidence of the existence of a different leading idea.
• Any other quite obviously existing differences between Vygotsky and Leontiev and their respective disciples remain (mostly) inside these decision. That is, they do not meet the core of their common methodology but establish at most internal differentiations of cultural historical school only by using lower levels of methodology or other less important or external or secondary criteria.
• On the other hand, if any member of the closer personal circle – like e.g. Lurija in his early articles on the compatibility of psychoanalysis and Marxism (see Vygotsky's sharp critic in his letter to Leontiev 23. 07. 1929) or Zankov and Solov'ev (see Vygotsky's critic in his letters) – uses clearly divergent methodological principles they then in this regard do not belong to cultural historical school in the defined sense.
• This understanding has to prove its plausibility by explaining harmony and difference of Vygotsky's and Leontiev's views of general psychology or methodology respectively.

4. Let me start with a description of their shared philosophical orientation – more precisely: of their personal interpretation of what was called dialectical materialism.

But at first I should remind you that Vygotskiy was already a Marxist when he came to Moscow. He had read Marx in German, he was a scholar highly educated in dialectical and historical materialism, and he was an experienced expert of the Marxian historico-logical method. What is even more important, concerning the scientific relation to Lurija and Leontiev he was their philosophical teacher and sometimes their sharp critic. During his lifetime he had more jobs of political responsibility than Leontiev and Lurija altogether. It is therefore a totally ignorant and absurd allegation and a silly distortion of facts to argue that Marxism had been imputed to Vygotsky by Lurija and Leontiev.
This claim corresponds with a second distortion of facts already emerging with the very beginning of Vygotsky's reception in the USA featuring Vygotsky as a nonpolitical scientist, a
pure psychologist and a theoretician of semiotics only whereas Leontiev was considered a politician and an ideologist. In the line of this view Vygotsky was the genuine founder of cultural historical school whereas Leontiev was the traitor of his teacher and corrupting his work.

In this concern I should not forget to mention that Vygotsky and Leontiev explained their (sometimes literally identical) philosophical convictions only in form of manuscripts they never published – Vygotsky in his famous crisis article, and Leontiev mainly in „Materials on consciousness“ and „Methodological diary“. The reason is quite obvious: Their philosophical interpretation of Marxism was so clearly in contradiction to the official phraseology of the Communist Party and its Central Committee that to publish it would have been extremely dangerous.

Main philosophical basis for both of them is the dialectical theory of unity and difference of nature, that is of being and thinking or nature and consciousness. In the words of Lenin, matter and reflection or spirit and matter are different forms of a „homogeneous and inseparable nature“.

This implies two important ideas seeing movement and reflection as the most general characteristics of any matter.

• Concerning movement: There is nothing in the world but moving and interacting matter, and therefore we do not need to look for any additional supernatural forces in order to explain neither the moving nor the interaction of nature, because the inevitably emerging contradictions in the course of moving things are simultaneously result and cause of moving, in other words, movement is a never ending process of emerging and dissolving contradictions – or in the words of Engels: they are „causa finalis“ of things. During the historical development of movement there emerge new and more complex forms which require special notions and concepts with respect to material formations like inorganic and organic nature, or animal and human nature. With respect to the formation of organic nature movement is to be considered as „self movement“ or in modern terminology: as autopoiesis. The highest, human, level of self movement is societal practice. (Sokolova 2003) In terms of methodology this view may be called a process ontology. (On meaning and importance of this concept I will come back later.)

• Concerning reflection: Any interaction of things is at the same time a reflection. Meeting each other things keep their hitting. In other words, reflection is produced by reality, and simultaneously it is in itself a form of reality. During the historical development of self movement there emerge new and more complex forms of reflection and new forms of their interaction and interrelation with those historical forms of self movement which require special notions and concepts of reflection with respect to material formations like inorganic and organic nature, or animal and human nature. (In terms of Leontiev's: With respect to the formation of organic nature this reflection is to be considered as „psyche“). The highest level of reflection is consciousness.

To sum up Vygotsky’s and Leontiev’s commonalities it can be said that they share the following convictions:

Human practice is

• not a special ability which is to be acquired in the course of ontogenesis but is a general characteristic of human life. In realising itself by any individual it will necessarily acquire the existing historical forms of societal practice,
not a biological or physical possibility which will be realised by the adaptation to cultural contents but is a self moving process which is historically and culturally defined from its very beginning and working on a biological and physical basis,

not purely individual but historically and ontogenetically from its very beginning societal. Even in its initial ontogenetic development this basic historical and societal quality has to be considered,

not separable from consciousness. Practice produces consciousness and is simultaneously its product. Even with mentally handicapped people we have to assume the full quality of human practice,

not a more or less successful realisation or ratification of a running ahead theory but is always more rich in substance and more true than theory or consciousness anticipating it. (Leontiev 2012, 117) This implies – as Schürmann puts it – the inconceivability and in exhaustability of practice, that is its unfathomable historicism (Schürmann 2011).

Consciousness is

not a super- or outernatural entity but a special appearance of nature,

not an assumed Apriori of abstract metaphysical thinking but produced by reality itself,

not a fixed or closed system but permanently combined and tied up with objective reality of human societal practice by real material processes, realising the permanent transmission of the material into the ideal, of objective reality into consciousness, and vice versa the transfer of the idea into reality,

not an appearance existing independently from individual persons but a quality of a real material person realising its material process of life,

not the essential or constituting object (predmet, Gegenstand) of psychology only, but object of several different sciences,

finally, human practice – in the sense of self moving process – is not the required explanatory principle but the decisive starting point of general psychological research, the corner stone of special methodological studies.

5. But the crucial point of their agreement is their understanding of process ontology. Process ontology means a theory explaining nature by nothing but processes assuming moving as explanatory principle which is not to be explained itself. Explanation is not needed concerning the facticity or reality of processes but in contrary of why and how identities, invariabilities, stagnation, stabilities, calmness, and standstill are possible. What we were formerly used to view as things are now and solely products and these products are nothing but „coagulated“ processes. Processes are involved with each other as far as any unity of a process is at the same time a variety of processes producing a variety of products. Processes are always moving by themselves. Forces or factors are no more causes but aspects of processes which can also be viewed as causalities to forces, and forces are nothing else than inner differenciations of processes. Processes show internal and external qualities thus forming a hierarchic and systemic structure of levels making possible that any external appears on another level as internal and vice versa. Processes are permanently tied up with their complementary opposite processes whose totality forms a similarly structured world. (Schürmann 2008)

With regard to the title of our lecture we may say – quoting Schürmann: „Activity theory is the explanation and representation of a complete process ontology. To Leontiev of 1959 activity is the concrete form of process concerning the level of organic nature; to Leontiev of
1975 human activity is the concrete form of process concerning the level of society.“
(Schürmann )²

6. The actually essential point of their common methodological views – even when referring on Engels’ „Dialectic of nature“ (see Schürmann 1995) – is their then revolutionary standpoint of process ontology being just a form of conceptualisation and by no means a naturalisation of process claiming, that processes are objective in the sense of independent from our perception and theory being sort of a hoard or a stronghold of truth about human practice able to deduce from it what human consciousness is, as it was the official and obligatory interpretation of Marxism by communist party.

As far as I know this interpretation was for the first time formulated in 1990 by Volker Schürmann who today is one of the most important philosophers of activity theory. Schürmann expressed his summary of the general philosophy of practice of the cultural historical school by the formula: „The logic of practice is not the logic of theory and it is a fundamental scholastic error to consider the logic of theory the origin of the logic of practice.“ (Schürmann 2008) He explains his understanding using critical psychology as an example. Central argument of critical psychology's main concept of „action potent“ is the realisation of existing abilities of man that is of possibilities whereas cultural historical school proceeds from existing realities in order to find out their open possibilities. (For more details concerning critical psychology see Schürmann 1993, 93-100). Human practice is not the capability of a certain potential of acting but is primarily the reality of its performance. This reveals the difference between a deterministic and an indeterministic model. We speak of a deterministic approach when arguing that human practice can only be received and explained as the result of multiple effecting conditions, that is as directly and unequivocably deduced from determining factors. Cultural historical school contrasting to those deterministic models of action theories knows and stresses the difference between autarky and autonomy keeping principally the self movement of any active organism which has been perfectly expressed by Leontiev's methodological warning: „There is no development at all deducible from forms of its necessary prerequisites only. The dialectical method of Marxism requires to study development as a process of self movement, of analysing its internal moving relations, contradictions and mutual transitions as well as its prerequisites as its in itself transforming essential moments.“ (Leontiev 2012, 151)

Finally, it is essential to cultural historical school that societal meaning can by no means be indoctrinated – in other words, learning is always a process of self movement. In other words, the indeterministic modell of self movement expresses in contrast with determinism a particular understanding of freedom regarding the respective ruling conditions not like restrictions but like possibilities of taking certain liberties and enabling practice. But at least this point opens up for far reaching perspectives of the ideological functions of cultural historical school I mentioned at the beginning.

References

² Schürmann is totally right: „It is a big tactical failure of this theory not to establish stabil terms concerning those respective material definitions. Thus activity is once „primary abstraction“ to the science of the organic, and some other time to the science of the human organic or the science of consciousness.“ (Schürmann 1995, 47).


