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Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

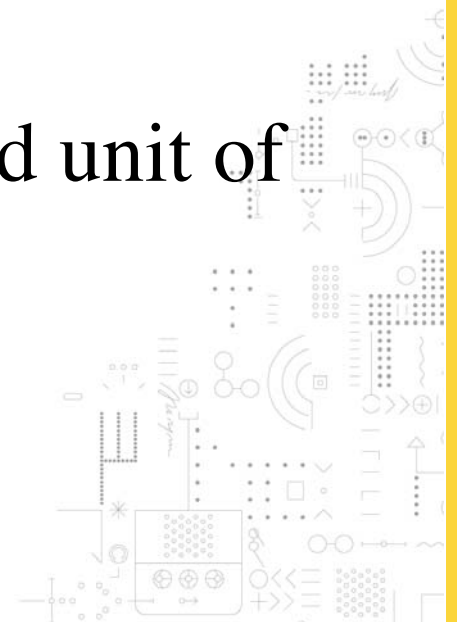
TOOL 5100/ INF 5200

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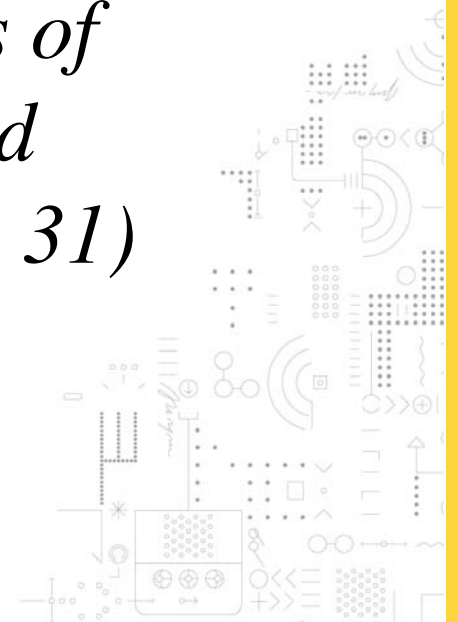
Aim

- Understand individuals and the social entities they compose in their natural everyday lives
- Activity: Fundamental concept and unit of analysis



Activity (1/2)

A purposeful interaction of the subject with the world, a process in which mutual transformations between the poles of “subject-object” are accomplished (Leont’ev in Kapetelinin & Nardi, 31)





Activity (2/2)

- The subject and the object can not be understood separately and without the context of the activity
- The object is what activity is directed towards
- Properties of the subject – generalization
- Activity as key source of development
- Participation in activities determined by the nature of the activity



Three generations of Activity Theory

First generation: Vygotsky 1920's and 30's

- Individual - culture

Second generation: Leont'ev (1978 / 1981)

- Collective activity, mediational means, Div. of labour as basic historical process

Third generation: CHAT Engeström, Cole

- Dialogue and multiple perspectives, cultural diversity



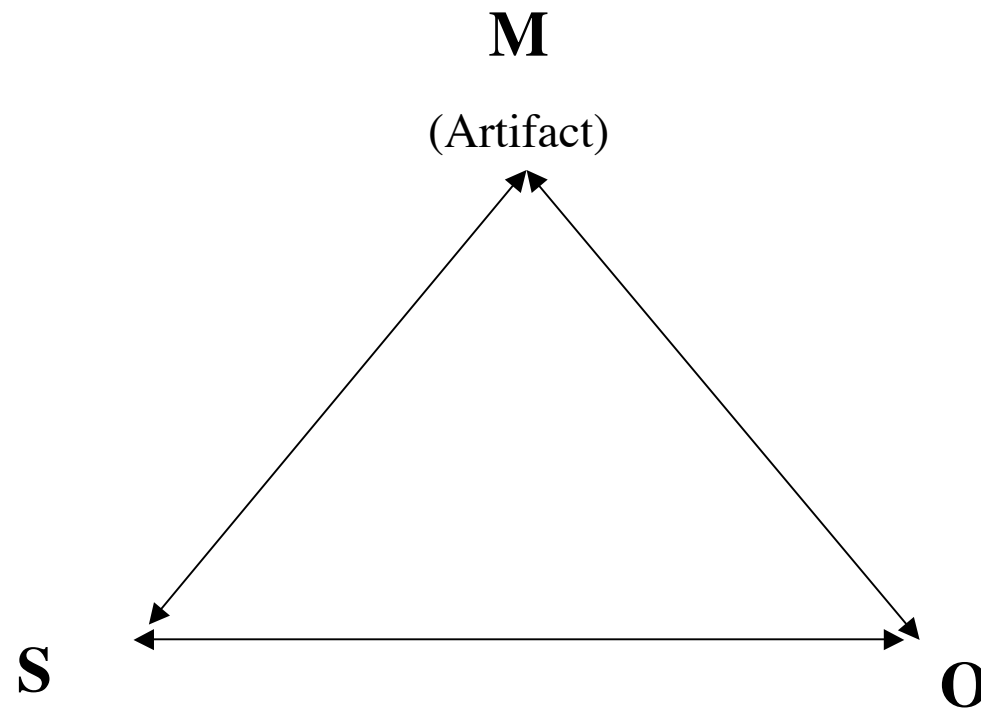
Two ideas from the 1920's:

- The unit of consciousness and activity
 - Subject – object relationship
- The social nature of the human mind
 - Culture/society are generative forces directly involved in production of mind





Mediational triangle





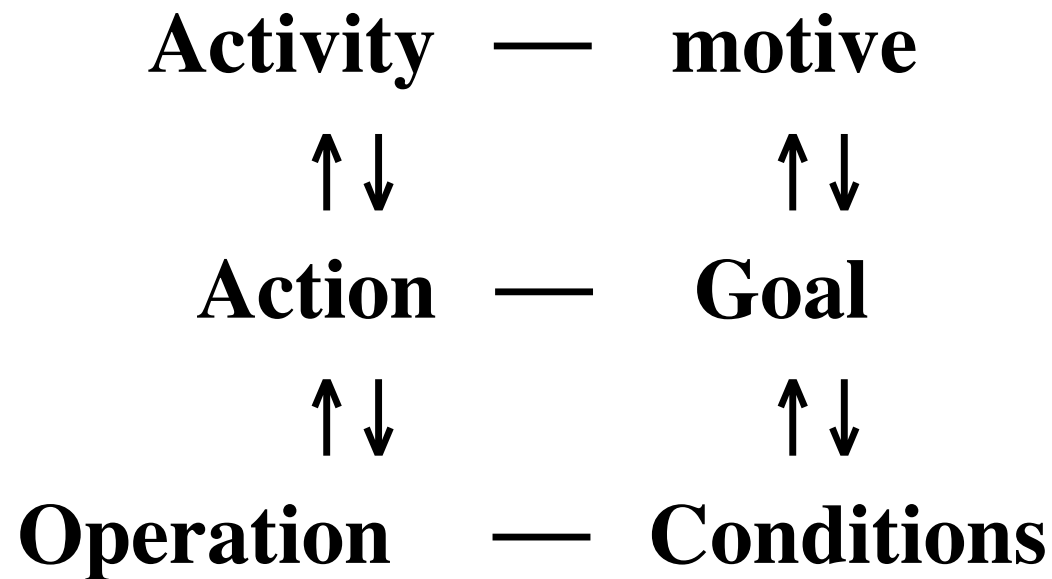
Mind and culture:

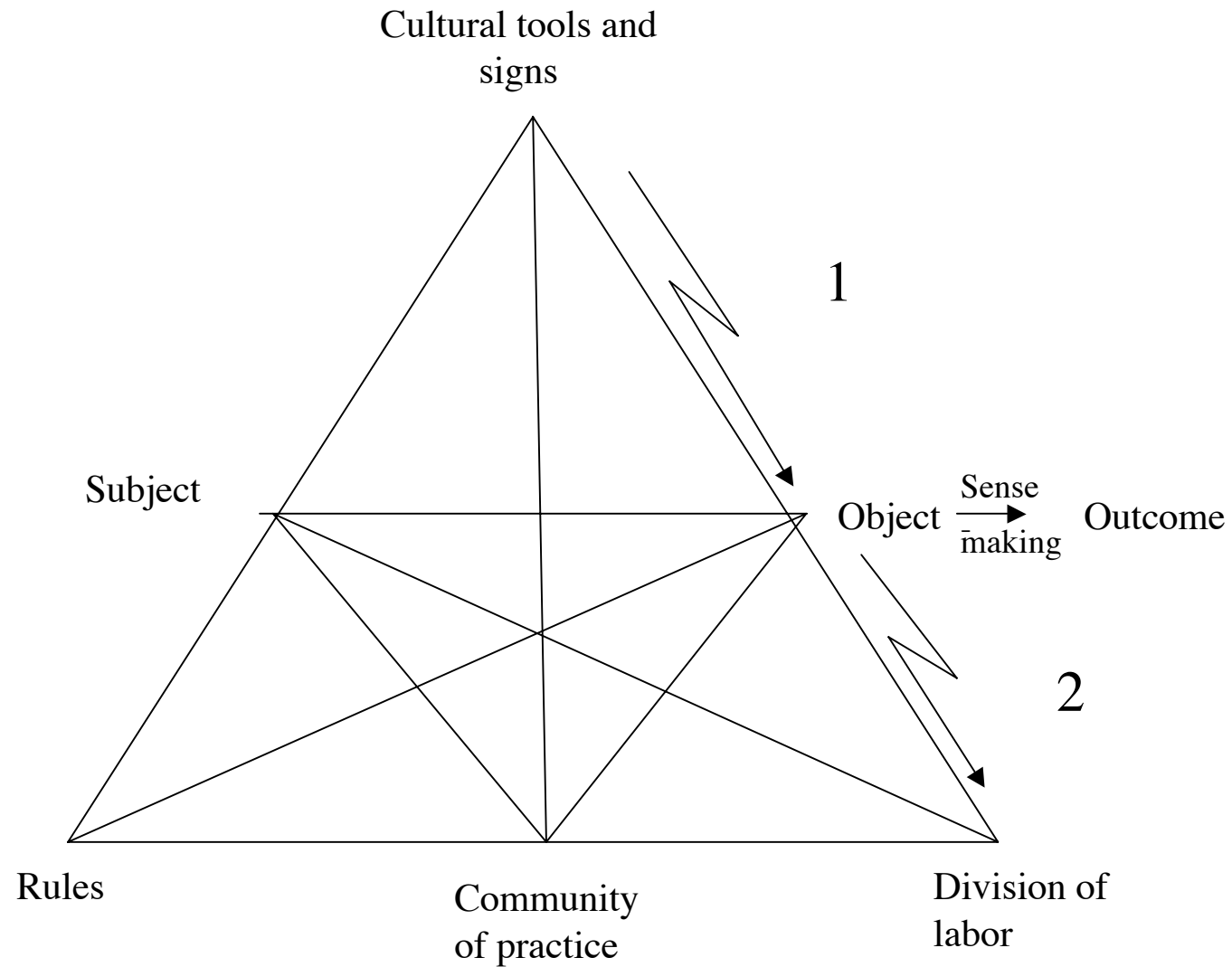
- The dialectic interaction between individuals and the world
- The Internal – External dimension
 - Psychological tools
 - Instruments and signs
 - The law of psychological development (from interpsych. to intrapsych.)
 - Internalization / externalization
- The Individual – Collective dimension
 - Internalization /externalization





Hierarchical levels of Activity





The Activity system (Engeström, 1987)





Subject (agency)

- Relation between subject and object:
Asymmetrical
- Ability to produce effects
- Agent is the subject of activity with the ability and need to act
- The real-life study of technology: A part of unfolding human interaction with the world





Object of activity

- What action is directed towards (something in the world)
- Motivate activities
- Separates one activity from another
- Dynamic: transforms as the activity unfolds
 - Available tools and signs





Division of labour

- Participation in socially distributed work activities
- Individual action: motivated by one object but directed towards another:
 - Ex: Collective activity of hunting (“beaters” and “shooters”)





Tool mediation

- Shape the way we interact with the world
- Culturally developed
- Mediators for purposeful human actions
- Relate human beings to the objective world and to human culture and history



Artifact

An artifact is an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal-directed human action (Cole, M. 1996: 117).

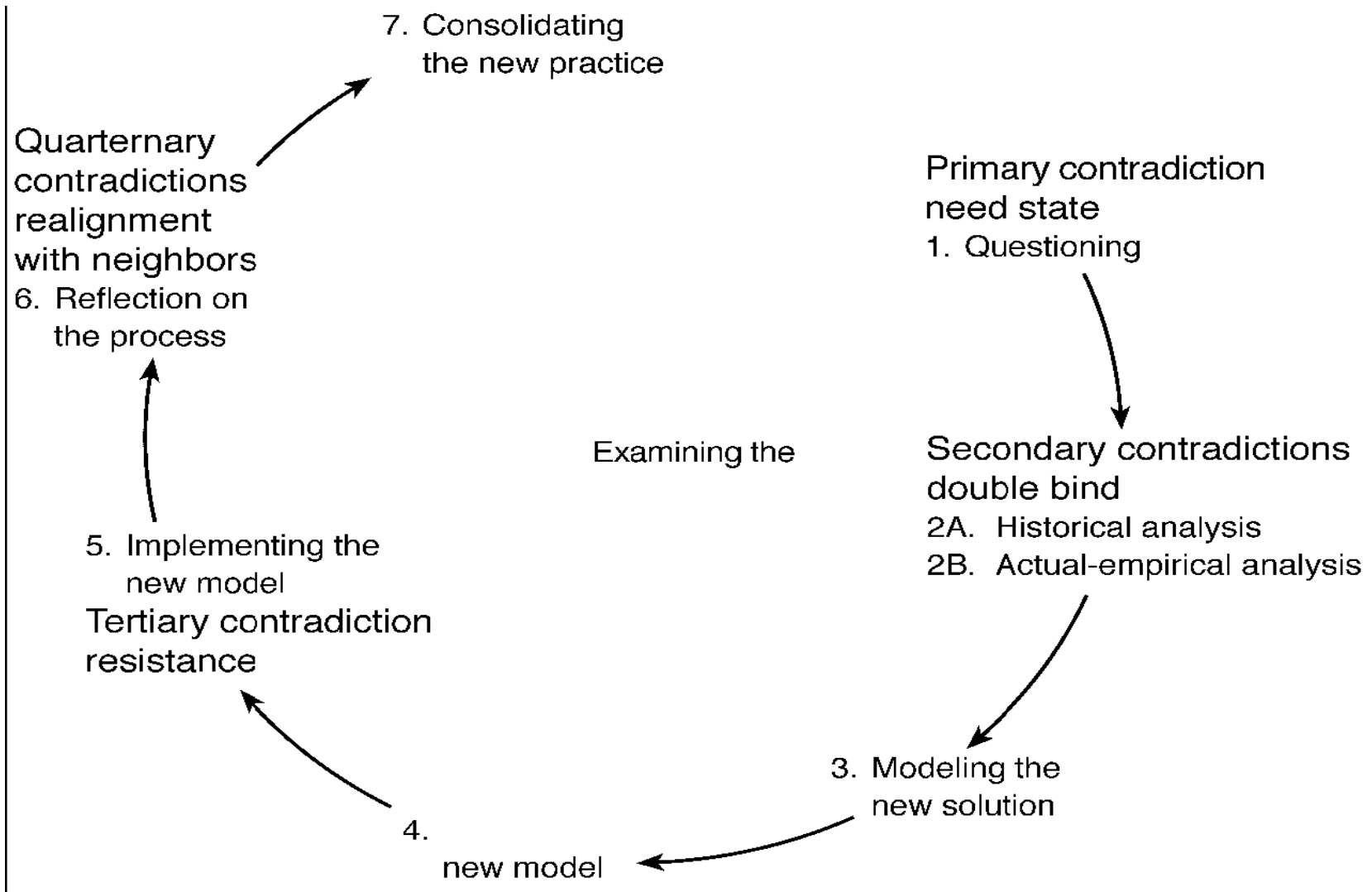




The hierarchical structure of activity

- Actions: conscious, goal-directed processes
 - Necessary to fulfil the object
- Operations correspond to the way the action is carried out
 - routinized and unconscious
- The object remains fixed, but goals, actions and operations change as conditions change





The cycle of expansive learning (Engeström 2001)



Five principles: Summarizing CHAT

- Activity system as primary unit of analysis
- Multi-voicedness (multiple points of views, traditions and interests) within the Activity system
- History: Shape/transform over time
- Contradictions as source of change
- Possibility for expansive transformation (cycles of qualitative transformation)

