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**THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**  
ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ

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## The Development of Consciousness in the Context of the Problem of Sign and Symbolic Mediation

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The problem of the development of individual consciousness as a process of acquisition of cultural forms and the formation of relations between its structural components is considered. The hypothesis is proposed that the various types of cultural forms which a person acquires build systemic links between components of the structure of consciousness. Acquisition of the corresponding types of cultural forms has a certain ontogenetic sequence. The typology of cultural forms is proposed. It is based on a functional criterion and correlates with the structure of consciousness. The cultural forms are divided into two groups — sign and symbolic. The sign forms represent the agent-to-object links and relations. The symbolic forms represent the agent-to-agent ones. The sign forms include objects-substituents (objective actions), spatial patterns, models, word-concepts, social gestures. Symbolic ones include bodily practices, artistic images, expressive gestures, myths (narratives) and symbols. Semantic codes occupy an intermediate position. Differentiation of ideas about the functions and ontogeny of assimilation of various cultural forms can be used to create a uniform practice of psychological assistance to children and adolescents based on a cultural-historical approach.

**Keywords:** consciousness, development, mediation, cultural form, sign, symbol.

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## Развитие сознания в контексте проблемы знакового и символического опосредствования

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Рассматривается проблема развития сознания индивида как процесса овладения формами культуры и формирования связей между его структурными компонентами. Предлагается гипотеза о том, что различные типы культурных форм, которыми овладевает человек, выполняют функцию построения системных связей между компонентами структуры сознания. Овладение соответствующими типами культурных форм имеет определенную онтогенетическую последовательность. На основе функционального критерия и в соответствии со структурой сознания предлагается типология культурных форм, которые разделены на две группы — знаковые и символические. Знаковые формы представляют субъект-объектные связи и отношения, а символические — субъект-субъектные. К знаковым формам отнесены предметы-заместители (предметные действия), пространственные схемы, модели, слова-понятия, социальные жесты; к символическим — телесные практики, художественные образы, экспрессивные жесты, мифы (нарративы), символы. Промежуточное положение занимают

семантические коды. Дифференциация представлений о функциях и онтогенезе освоения различных культурных форм может использоваться для создания единой практики психологической помощи детям и подросткам, основанной на культурно-историческом подходе.

**Ключевые слова:** сознание, развитие, опосредствование, культурная форма, знак, символ.

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## Research Problem

The development of human consciousness in cultural-historical psychology is directly connected with the mastery of cultural forms as psychological tools. This process is the essence of the individual's socialization, since it ensures the appropriation of one's cultural-historical experience. In this regard, the problem of developing mediation becomes particularly acute in the context of creating a variety of developmental (i.e., educational, correctional) psychological and pedagogical practices [4–9; 11; 16; 18; 21; 23–25].

The creation thereof involves deep insight into the development and functioning of cultural forms in the mind of the individual. V. P. Zinchenko and E. B. Morgunov write: "The objective, final side of social abilities that determine the real individual's activity is expressed in the forms of culture; activity, as you know, dies out in its object. Therefore, psychologists need to reconstruct the content of the principle of activity in culture as an object of appropriation, with which the logic of the development of the individual's consciousness should be internally coherent" [11, p. 176].

The variety of cultural forms creates the need to form a typology thereof in accordance with the specifics of their functions in the development and operation of consciousness. The same circumstance allows us to present consciousness as a complexly organized functional organ which simultaneously solves many problems [10; 11].

The complexity of the functional organization of consciousness motivated V.P. Zinchenko to develop upon the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and A.N. Leontiev about its structure [10; 11]. He emphasized that his model of the structure of consciousness is intended to reflect its content and functioning in a concise form: "The most important functions and properties of consciousness must be derived from the structure" [11, p. 188]. If we proceed from this, we are faced with the task of linking its functions and structure.

A solution to this problem would avoid the reduction of consciousness to its separate functions (which

has been done many times in psychology before), since the structure of consciousness is designed to model its functioning as a whole. In addition, the structural model of consciousness will help to understand the systemic relationships between its individual components [1].

To establish functional and structural links, it is necessary to develop a typology of cultural forms based on ideas about the structure of consciousness. This method of defining types of cultural forms and their corresponding functions (tasks) enables us to create a holistic picture of the operation and development of the individual's consciousness, as well as a more differentiated approach to the practices of its development and psychological correction.

## The Structure of Consciousness and Mediation

Ideas about the structure of consciousness have been developed in various areas and schools of psychology [1; 10; 11; 14; 17]. However, considering consciousness through the prism of the agent's cultural development, the most adequate and fully developed concept of the structure of consciousness is described in the works of the Russian psychologists A.N. Leontiev and V.P. Zinchenko [10; 11; 14]. Leontiev singled out three constituents of consciousness: the sensory tissue responsible for image, meaning and sense [14]. The first refers to the ontological layer of consciousness, the last two — to the reflexive. Zinchenko suggested supplementing the ontologic layer of consciousness with a biodynamic tissue — an organ for building living movement (a concept proposed by N. A. Bernshtein) [10].

Zinchenko also developed ideas about the spiritual layer of consciousness, with human I (and the other I, i.e., You) as its core, based on the work of such famous thinkers as S.L. Frank, M. Scheler, M. Buber, M.M. Bakhtin, and G.G. Shpet [10]. He believes that ideas about the I, or more precisely, about the I-You relationship are logically built into the Vygotsky's ideas about inter- and intra-individuality, D.B. Elkonin ideas on joint activi-

ties, and A.A. Ukhtomsky ideas on the "dominant on the face of another".

Despite the fact that the functions of cultural forms are traditionally associated with executive functions, reflection of human experience, generalization and communication, in our opinion, the function of "internal maintenance" of consciousness should also be singled out. That is, the function of building systemic links between the components of consciousness and mediating their interaction and mutual transitions. In this regard, it can be assumed that *the most important characteristic of the development of consciousness from the view of cultural-historical psychology is the construction of internal systemic links between its constituent components, due to their mediation by various cultural forms.*

The development of the idea of mediation in this context requires the differentiation of cultural forms in accordance with the types of connections they serve, as well as the logic of the ontogenetic development of consciousness. The effectiveness of the differentiation of cultural forms according to this criterion is seen in the possibility of its application in the creation of a holistic concept of the developmental practices that contribute to the socialization and mental development of the child. In addition, this idea may be helpful in understanding the psychological mechanisms of dissociation or disorders in consciousness development which remain practically unexplored and are represented only by clinical descriptions of their altered states.

### Functions of Cultural Forms as a Basis for their Typology

Thus, we consider the functions of cultural forms as a basis for constructing the typology thereof. Cultural forms can be divided into two types. The first type represents the functions of organization and regulation of the agent's conscious activity, i.e., mediation of interaction with subjective and objective reality, that is, cooperation with other agents and the transformation of objective reality. According to this criterion, cultural forms should be divided into symbols and signs. The former mediate the awareness of subjective reality and agent-to-agent relations, the latter mediate awareness of objective reality and objective activity<sup>1</sup>.

The second type of function includes those for establishing systematic connections between the components of consciousness. *Thanks to them, the artificial influence (due to training, correctional work, etc.) of cultural forms on the development of consciousness is revealed.* Our hy-

pothesis is that in order to build a certain type of connection between the corresponding components of consciousness, a specific type of signs and symbolic forms is used. At the same time, the varieties of these sign forms are used mainly to build objectively significant connections, varieties of symbolic forms — to create subjectively significant (sense-making) ones.

The structure of consciousness, the connections between its components and the localization of cultural forms are shown in Figure (Fig. 1). Connections that radiate out from the meanings (meaning to biodynamic tissue, meaning to sensory tissue, meaning to I, etc.) are represented mainly by the sign forms, and those that radiate out from sense (sense to You, sense to sensory tissue, sense to I, etc.) are the symbolic ones. The exception is the link "meaning of sense", which simultaneously refers to both the sign and symbolic forms.

Thus, the function of building systemic links allows us to more accurately differentiate cultural forms and determine their role in the development of consciousness. Consider the typology of the cultural forms in accordance with the specified criteria.

### The Sign Forms

The Sign forms are organized around components such as meaning and direct a person mainly towards the objective constituents of consciousness — biodynamic tissue, meaning and another I (You).

The simplest and ontogenetically earliest form of a sign is an *object action and an object-substituent*. An object action or movement, subordinated to the logic of using the object, allows it to be represented in the mind of the child, pointing to it and reproducing its properties, even in the absence of direct contact with it [5; 9; 14; 18; 21–23; 25]. So, for example, in infancy, a child, reproducing the grasping movement that he made with an object in its absence recreates its image [5]. According to D.P. Ausubel, senso-motor acts in the theory of J. Piaget are signs of the objects to which they are directed [22]. A.N. Leontiev understood object actions as a prototype of verbal meanings [14]. Also, object-substituents (a stick — as a spoon, a handkerchief — as a blanket), which a child begins to use in the second year of life, perform the function of a sign, since they point to another, albeit similar, object. It is important that the child singles out the functions and purpose (meaning) of the substituted objects through object actions (movements) and object-substituents [9; 21].

The second sign form, which begins to be acquired in early childhood, is the *spatial scheme* [18; 24]. In the

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed justification for the distinction between symbols and signs is presented in our other works [16].

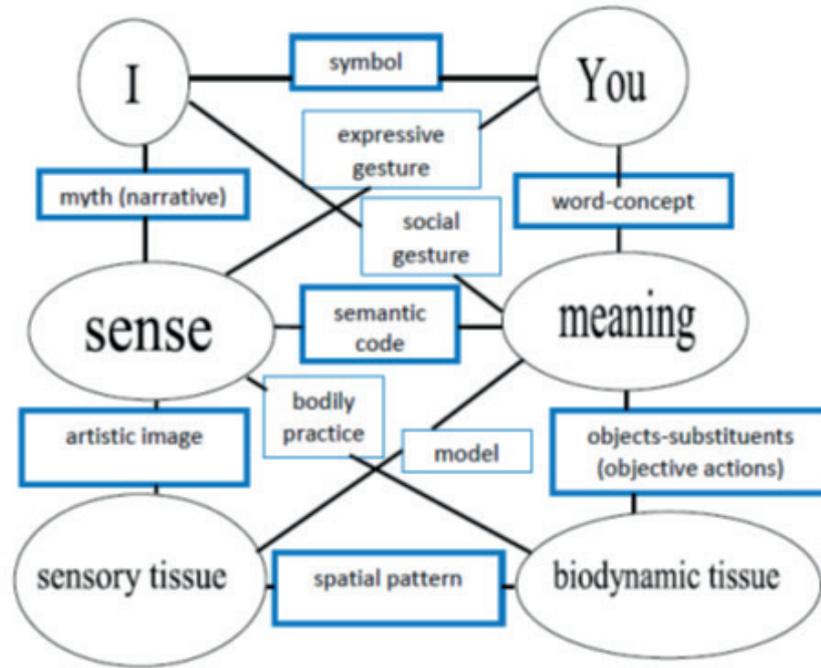


Fig. 1. Cultural forms in the structure of consciousness

literature, it can be found under the names of 'graphic symbol' or 'model' [24]. It is important to note that this is a spatial object visually similar to the replaced object. For example, a child may fold their hands into a triangle, showing a house. An image of an object can act as a spatial scheme. Graphic symbols are mastered only by the age of 3–4 due to the fact that the child perceives them for a long time as self-sufficient objects, not as signs of other objects [24]. More complex versions of spatial schemes generally mastered at primary school age, are quasi-spatial objects (clocks, calendars, plans/schedules). The main function of spatial schemes is the transformation of movements and actions into the space of images and their reverse transformation, which ensure the interaction of the sensory and biodynamic tissue of consciousness [10].

Regarding the provision of assistance to children at the early and preschool ages, the actualization of the object-substituent, object actions (movements) and spatial schemes is deeply and thoroughly covered in studies by A.V. Zaporozhets and L.A. Wenger on sensory education and the development of visually-shaped thinking, in the "Tools of the mind" approach (E. Bodrova, D. Leong), and in child neuropsychology as a whole [9; 23].

The next cultural form that mediates the interaction of meanings and You (the Other) is the word-concept, which generalizes the human experience in its essential characteristics for it to be shared with other people. The word connects us to universal human experience and places our consciousness into a cultural context [5; 6; 10; 11]. This form and the ontogeny of its acquisition

have been best studied in psychology. Suffice it to recall such researchers in this field as Vygotsky, Luria, Bruner, Piaget, and Davydov [5; 6; 11; 18; 23]. The ultimate goal of mastering a word-concept is the development of its generalized and reflective cultural meaning, fixing the properties of an object that are essential in any respect. However, not only the cognitive function of the word is important, but also the fact that it becomes the point where different minds meet each other, creating a "shared" field of meanings.

The *model* should be referred to in the sign forms. It occupies an intermediate position between a word-concept and a spatial scheme, since, on the one hand, it is a visually represented object that represents something in the space-time continuum, and, on the other hand, it reflects only the properties of the object that are essential for solving a specific problem. An example of a model is a set of colored rectangles laid out in a certain sequence and displaying the morphological structure of a word. Normally, children begin to master modeling at primary school age. Studies of modeling in the educational activities of schoolchildren are prominently presented within the theory of developmental education by D.B. Elkonin and V.V. Davydov [8; 21].

The last of the sign forms that connect meaning with one's own I is the *social gesture*. We categorize it as a sign form due to a certain and unambiguous understanding of its content by a large number of people, in contrast to the polysemantic and unique sense of the symbol. It is impersonal, addressed not to specific individuals, but to a group formed on formal grounds. If, for example, a man wears a suit and tie,

he demonstrates his social position and belonging to a formal group (deputy, leader, etc.), and does not address a personal message to one or several specific people (in the latter case, clothing turns into a symbolic message, as, for example, a dress of sparkling silver brocade and a large scarf of crimson chiffon of the main character of S. Maugham's novel "The Theater", Julia Lambert, in one of the final scenes). A social gesture allows you to demonstrate to others your position and status among others, for example, the role of a winner or victim, an intellectual or a "simple guy". We interpret such a gesture in the spirit of R. Barthes, who focuses on its deliberateness, the intentional strengthening by the agent of the characteristic behaviors, statements, clothing, etc., their redundancy in relation to the situation and practical meaning [3]. R. Barthes analyzes gestures that appear in various social situations — in a sketching competition, in advertising, in the press, in the behavior of politicians. Anything can be a social gesture — a word, an action, an object, clothing, a photograph. The manner and context of the use of a gesture is important. R. Barthes gives the example of a writer working during his summer vacation as an expression (gesture) of his special prestigious status, elevating him "above the prosaic social position, which is due to our, alas, too materialistic era", a representative of the "best mind" of society [3, p. 85]. R. Barthes connects the use of gestures with the development of modern mythology, which always has some hidden sense and subtext, which allows it to be classified as a symbol. In his interpretation, signs (words, gestures) serve as the basic elements for constructing a myth.

### Symbolic Forms

One of the most accessible and forms to be mastered early on is *bodily practice*. By this, we refer to any cultural methods (movements and actions) for meeting needs and expressing personal sense. These methods determine how we eat, keep warm, bathe, move around, communicate with other people, and reveal the needs and senses behind them.

Body practices include instrumental gestures as one of the methods of non-verbal communication. Their initial form is understood as the failed object action (movement) of a child, which an adult "reads" as a request for some help (for example, an unsuccessful attempt to reach an object turns into a pointing gesture) [9; 11; 21; 25]. The child begins to master them from the end of the first year of life. Instrumental gestures are similar to object actions, but, unlike the latter, they serve not as a means of object substitution, but as a form of communication with another.

Some authors see in such gestures the communicative intentions of a child, and the gestures themselves are understood as polysemantic [25]. For example, a gesture of giving (a child holds out an object to an adult) can have

different meanings — an offer to play, a protest reaction, etc. Not only is the polysemantic nature of such a gesture important, but also the fact that it serves as a form of communication with the Other, which can reflect not only the intention of a child, but also the intention of an adult.

As a rule, bodily practices are associated with the use of cultural tools (cutlery, clothes, etc.). Mastering them requires the restructuring of movements according to the logic of their use [9; 21]. Mastering bodily practices should be correlated with the formation of self-service skills. However, in reality, this is a broader task, which includes the mastery of various movements — locomotion, articulation (think of B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*), eye movements, etc.

Despite the outwardly apparent certainty of various bodily practices, they contain a rich content of sense, which allows them eventually to turn into social gestures or symbolic acts. For example, certain ways of eating become gestures expressing belonging to a certain class, social group, or turn into a family ritual that symbolically maintains a connection between relatives.

The second variety of symbolic forms is *artistic images* that connect the sensual tissue of consciousness with its component of sense. The artistic image, being a sensually presented image, is similar to a spatial scheme and model. However, it differs fundamentally from them in its emphasis on subjectively significant elements of experience. If models and spatial schemes seek to convey an objectively important and general content, abstracting from everything individual and "random", then the artistic image, on the contrary, relies on an expressive, visual, living sensibility in order to emphasize the individuality and uniqueness of the image and to alienate (V.B. Shklovsky), that is, to detach the viewer (reader, listener) from everyday reality, to turn his or her consciousness toward the inner reality, the reality of sense [7; 15; 20].

So, G.G. Shpet considers art as a special kind of knowledge that highlights the value-semantic reality of a person and is presented in the form of sensory-emotional experience [20]. He, like Vygotsky, emphasizes the uniqueness of the artistic image, which, unlike the sign, is not included in the actual connections of things, but, on the contrary, renounces these connections, taking our consciousness beyond the framework of everyday reality [7; 20].

In this regard, an important task in interacting with an art form is its "decomposition", isolation from its object content and the direct meaning of the image, in order to reveal the hidden semantic content [15; 20]. According to A.F. Losev, art is allegorical in relation to life, metaphorical, "...because the actor depicts on stage what he really is not" [15, p. 429]. When referring to an artistic image, it is important to understand that it is not really about what it literally depicts (for example, the images of animals and plants in a fairy tale or fable do not signify them as such,

but people's relationships and mental states). To do this, it is necessary to actively relate to the artistic image, to carry out the work of living through it aesthetically. However, at the simplest and ontogenetically early levels of comprehending an art form, only its emotional expressiveness comes to the fore. It sets the cultural norms of objectifying emotional states and their sense in expressive movements, sounds and images. This feature allows us to suppose that the earliest kind of art form is an *expressive gesture* used in personal communication to express one's own mental states. An expressive gesture towards the Other in a situation of communication makes it possible to attribute to it a variety of symbolic forms. In addition, an expressive gesture is inextricably merged with the mental state and relations of a person, which are expressed in it bodily. The artistic image, in this respect, remote from its inner content, only hints at it.

In its function, the artistic image is similar to the *semantic code*, the artistic form of which, however, is simpler, lacking the same unique specificity and richness of the sensual fullness, while also conveying an evaluative attitude to something in a conventional form [2]. The semantic code is the simplest sign-symbolic form, on the one hand, expressing the emotionally-evaluative attitude of a person to something or someone, and on the other hand, objectifying the cultural significance of the object being evaluated. In this regard, it is difficult to attribute to it purely symbolic or purely sign forms. In its "symbolism" it is closest to instrumental and expressive gestures, in its "signism" to words and social gestures. Semantic codes can be represented using words ("good", "hard", "cool", "trash", "sucks", etc.), colors, shapes, sounds, as well as various rating scales that are widely used in psychological tests, etc. This form has been actively studied in psychosemantics and the psychology of subjective semantics [2].

*Myth (narrative)* is of particular importance to the construction of identity, the I of a person [4; 12; 15]. In this regard, several essential characteristics of myth and narrative should be highlighted.

First, myth is understood as a symbolic form [3; 15; 19]. This means that, on the one hand, myth is material, based on specific facts ("not ideal", "based on specific facts", according to A.F. Losev) [15]. On the other hand, it expresses the agent, his I, his partiality. R. Barthes writes about the value essence of myth [3]. A.F. Losev notes its affective nature, its "vitality" [15]. Myth is a message not about things, but about personalities: "A myth always speaks not about mechanisms, but about organisms, and even more so, about persons, about living beings" [15, p. 424].

At the same time, a myth (narrative) should be distinguished from a symbol in the narrow meaning of the word. A symbol as such is always addressed to the Other, it serves as a form of existence of one personality for another. This is its connecting, communicative function.

A myth is, as it were, self-sufficient, addressed to one agent, and the symbol is "divided into two ones".

Secondly, a myth (narrative) is historical, and it is a personal narrative or the history of a person [4; 15]. A.F. Losev writes: "Myth is a personal being... The image of a personal being, a personal form, the face of a personality" [15, p. 459]. Further, he directly states: "Every living person is one way or another a myth" [15, p. 461]. "A myth is a personal history given in words" [15, p. 535].

R. Barthes emphasizes the idea that a myth is a word, but a special word, which is chosen by history, and its meaning cannot be derived from the "nature of things" [3].

J. Bruner considers the creation of a narrative (which is based on a myth) as the creation of a personal story and the construction of a person's own life [4].

Thus, it can be argued that a myth (narrative) is a special form of a word — the word-narrative, the word-story, the instrumental logic of which differs from the word-concept. Otherwise, a myth (narrative) is a story in which a person is gradually revealed in words that acquire sense only in relation to the story as a whole. We should agree with R. Barthes that a myth is secondary in relation to a single word, the content of which *becomes a form for constructing* a myth [3].

Obviously, one of the most important functions of myth (narrative) is the function of identity construction, self-formation and self-determination [4; 12].

Thirdly, defining myth as a special cultural form requires comparing it with an artistic image. A.F. Losev draws attention to the fact that the similarity between them lies in the detachment from everyday reality, the orientation to the supersensible semantic content [15, p. 422]. R. Barthes writes about alienation and deformation in the myth of one's own objective meaning of things [3].

Differences between an artistic image and a myth, according to A.F. Losev, are seen in the great importance of the external form for the former (a myth can be represented artistically, but not necessarily) and in its metaphorical, allegorical nature [15, p. 429]. A myth is characterized by directness of expression: a myth is "not metaphorical, not allegorical, but a completely independent, authentic reality" [15, p. 426]. Through such an intrinsic synthesis of the form of a myth and its sense, an internal personal dimension and sensual images form, words seem true to us, we believe them. The passion in the myth, its saturation with affectation is connected with the same feature [15].

Fourth, speaking about the relationship between myth and narrative, it should be noted that the former underlies the latter, meaning these two forms are close [4]. However, there are differences between them.

A myth is an intuitive, pre-reflexive cultural form that implies direct perception by the agent of the reality presented in it and belief in its truthfulness [15]. This feature makes it total, universal, manifested in ev-

ery thing and their properties (the mythology of color, sounds, names, etc.). Any thing, action, image, in which the expression of personality is seen, becomes a myth. Similarly, in the body, especially in the face, we see a person's mental states, intentions, and attitudes.

Narrative, unlike myth, is reflexive [4; 12]. According to J. Bruner, it contains an appeal to the consciousness of the character [4]. The appearance in the narrative of an additional dimension of the character's consciousness is not accidental and is associated with the strengthening of the role of the individual in building his story, which is inseparable from his life. This provision can be associated with A. N. Leontiev's idea about the transformation of personality from an object of development into the agent thereof [14]. In this context, the question of the formation of personality appears to be the question of creating a life story [4].

A *symbol*, on the one hand, combines the properties of the above symbolic forms and, in certain cases, may coincide with them. It paradoxically combines inextricably linked spiritual-ideal content with object-sensory content [10; 13; 15; 16; 19]. For example, K.A. Svasyan writes: "A symbol... we can call it an idea visible in a fact" [19, p. 159]. N.V. Kulagina considers the symbol as a mediator of human relations with the world, as a universal means of regulating spiritual-practical experience [13]. Through to the symbol, the agent can discover the sense of a whole being, inexpressible in rational sign forms. The author believes that symbolic formations are charged with unconscious attitudes, a deep-seated personal sense and motives.

On the other hand, the specificity of the symbol per se lies in its "being shared between two" persons. It is not only addressed to the Other as an expressive gesture, but must also be accepted by the Other. A gesture expressing the subjective state of a person remains as such, even if no attention is paid to it. A symbol immediately loses its symbolism if it turns out to be significant only for a single agent. Symbols are always forms of joint awareness. This understanding, by the way, also corresponds to the etymology of the word "symbol", which among the ancient Greeks meant fragments of a plate, shards matching each other, things which, when put together helped people identify each other, finding themselves bound by a union of friendship or any other moral obli-

gations. A symbol is something that connects particular people, forming a single whole, and it connects uniquely. The external form of the symbol is not random or arbitrary, it cannot be mechanically or logically composed of any other parts.

Thus, the symbol per se is the culmination of the development of various symbolic forms, integrating all the diversity of their characteristics<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, it cannot be completely reduced to any of them. A *symbol* can be defined as a form of an agent's personal appeal to the consciousness of the Other, expressing their personal relationship with each other. If the sign expresses the logic and relations of objective reality, then the symbol, due to its antinomy and personification, undermines it and brings the human consciousness into another dimension of reality – the dimension of agent-to-agent links and relations, the dimension of personal being. Through the appeal to the consciousness of the Other, one goes beyond one's own limited vision of the world. We see the main function of the symbol in the self-transcendence of consciousness, in the sequential overcoming of one's own always limited position.

## Conclusion

Thus, we propose that the development of consciousness be considered to be the formation of systemic links between its structural components based on the agent's acquisition of the relevant cultural forms and their functions in cooperation with other people. Cultural forms are divided into two types – sign and symbolic. The first reflects and allows a person to realize the agent-to-object relations to the world, and the second – the agent-to-agent relationships. Sign forms include objects-substituents (objective actions), spatial schemes, models, words-concepts, and social gestures. Symbolic forms include bodily practices, expressive gestures, artistic images, myths (narratives), and symbols. There is an ontogenetic sequence in the assimilation of various types of cultural forms, which, however, is difficult to tie closely to specific age periods of development. The typology of cultural forms we have developed can be used to create a holistic concept aiding the practical development of the individual's consciousness within the framework of the cultural-historical psychology.

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<sup>2</sup> This explains the rather late mastery of this form and its inclusion in communication with other people, which, according to our research, occurs only in late adolescence [16].

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