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Marco Cavallaro (eds.)

Perspectives on the Philosophy of Culture

Husserl and Cassirer

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Introduction

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) are generally recognized as major figures of two of the most important philosophical currents of the 20th century: phenomenology and neo-Kantianism. Fifteen years separate the birth year of Husserl from that of Cassirer. Their lives and philosophies inhabit a time when the German-speaking intellectual world was not (yet) split by the “parting of the ways” (Friedman 2000) between what we now call the analytic and continental traditions in philosophy. Nor did the so-called “continental divide” (Gordon 2010) cause the two philosophers any contention, which began to take shape no earlier than the Davos conference of 1929, which involved Cassirer (and Heidegger), of course, but not Husserl.¹ In a period of “identity crisis of philosophy” (Beiser 2017, 6) due to the decline of speculative idealism and the rise of the empirical sciences, Husserlian phenomenology and neo-Kantianism fought together for reaffirming the central role of philosophy in terms of a critical reflection on the foundations of the natural and the cultural sciences.

Beyond this common historical and theoretical background, Husserl’s and Cassirer’s philosophies have, as is well known, different origins. Husserl took up the thread of Brentano’s analysis on intentionality and, starting from the *Logical Investigations* (1900/01), laid the foundations of a radically new attempt to investigate experiences under the title of ‘phenomenology.’ On the other hand, Cassirer incorporates the critical approach of Marburg neo-Kantianism, in particular its formalization of the so called ‘transcendental method,’ as a means to accomplish a critique of scientific and cultural facts, while, beginning in the 1920s, he redefines the tasks of the critique of culture, grounding it on the problem of symbolism. But despite the manifest distance between their philosophical approaches, there are still many points of convergence between them.

¹ As Sebastian Luft (2019, xxv) reports, on this occasion Heidegger claimed that “‘for a period, Husserl had fallen into the arms of the Neo-Kantians,’ which presumably meant the temptation to conceive of phenomenology as a ‘first philosophy’ in the sense of an ultimate foundationalism.”

First of all, Husserl and Cassirer maintained an enduring, even though sporadic, personal relationship throughout their lives. As is well known, Husserl was close to Paul Natorp, one of the main exponents of neo-Kantianism in Marburg and teacher of Cassirer. In 1907, Husserl recommended both Natorp and Cassirer as candidates to succeed Julius Baumann's chair at his university in Göttingen. In a preparatory fragment for a letter to be sent to Cassirer written in 1910, Husserl (1994, 3) expresses regret that his proposal has not been successful and states that he "would have gladly wanted [Cassirer] as a colleague" in Göttingen (on this episode see Kern 1964, 31f. and Luft 2021, 229). The two thinkers have also met in person at least once. A chronicle of the time reports that Husserl attended a lecture on Rousseau held by Cassirer in Freiburg at the *Akademisch-Literarische Gesellschaft* upon the invitation by Heidegger in February 1932 (see Meyer 2006, 128, 173f.). In addition, both maintained an uninterrupted correspondence over the years, of which some important records are preserved. Moreover, starting in 1906, the year of the publication of the first volume of *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, Cassirer regularly sent his published works to Husserl (see *ibid.*, 128).

A letter sent by Husserl to Cassirer on April 3, 1925, as a reply to Cassirer's sending of the second volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, contains one of Husserl's most important accounts of his relationship to Marburg neo-Kantianism. Husserl (1994, 4) writes that although he "could not become a Neo-Kantian according to the Marburg form and method," he could nevertheless "appreciate the great achievement of this school for the preservation and furthering of Kantian thoughts" (translated in Luft & Makkreel 2012, 4). Cassirer replied to this letter on April 10, 1925, also insisting on the "common ground" between phenomenology and Marburg neo-Kantianism, which according to him consists in the thematization of the problem of the transcendental (see Husserl 1994, 6). Husserl replied in 1937 thanking Cassirer for sending *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics* and rejoicing at his arrival in Gothenburg after Cassirer's forced exile following the seizure of power by the National Socialists in 1933. In the same letter, Husserl informs Cassirer that he will soon send him his new work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (see *ibid.*, 8f.).²

² Meyer (2006, 219f.) points out that Husserl's work was published in the journal *Philosophia*, to which Cassirer also contributed.

If these exchanges bear witness to a friendly relationship between the two philosophers over the years as well as the reciprocal esteem surrounding their works, the analysis of their texts reveals a more complex situation in terms of the relation between their respective philosophical positions. As far as Husserl is concerned, there are no direct references to Cassirer – neither in his published works nor in his estate. One indirect reference to Cassirer might be found, at least according to Aron Gurwitsch (1974, 39), in the Galilei paragraph in Husserl’s *Crisis* (see Husserl 1970, § 9).³

Cassirer, on the contrary, makes frequent references to Husserl in his published works. In general, we can identify two phases in Cassirer’s engagement with Husserl. In the first phase, Cassirer focuses on Husserl’s achievements in the field of epistemological analysis as laid out in the *Logical Investigations*. He praises Husserl’s anti-psychologism as well as his analysis of the mathematical theory of concept formation. The second phase, following the publication of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29), is characterized by a criticism of Husserl’s theory of intentionality, which Cassirer counters with his notion of symbolic pregnance (see Cassirer 2021b, 226–242), on the one hand, and by an attempt to relate Husserl’s eidetics to the philosophy of culture, on the other. The latter, which is of utmost importance for the present volume, finds expression in a long footnote contained in the second volume of his masterpiece, devoted to a philosophical-cultural analysis of ‘mythical thought.’ Here, Cassirer (2021a, 32 ft. 15) remarks:

It is one of the fundamental merits of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology that it has once again sharpened our perception of the different spiritual “structural forms” and demonstrated a new approach to their study, departing from the psychological framing of the question and methodology. Particularly, the sharp separation of the psychological “acts” from the “objects” intended in them is vital here. Husserl’s own development from the *Logische Untersuchungen* (2 vols., Halle: Niemeyer, 1913–22) to the *Ideen*

³ The first volume of *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* contains a reference to Galileo Galilei’s philosophy (see Cassirer 1922, 377–417). Husserl had Cassirer’s book in his library (signature BA 247/1); however, he did not add any annotations to the Galileo presentation (see Smid 1993, xlxi). Likely, he could have also used Paul Natorp’s (1882) article *Galilei als Philosoph* as a source of inspiration.

zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie (Halle: Niemeyer, 1928) makes it increasingly clear that the task of phenomenology, as Husserl understood it, is not exhausted in the analysis of cognition, but rather, it calls for an investigation of structures of entirely different objective spheres, according to what they “signify” and without concern for the “reality” of their objects. Such an investigation must include the mythical “world,” not to derive its specific “existence” [*Bestand*] by induction from the manifold of ethnological and ethnic-psychological experience but to apprehend it in a purely “ideational” analysis.

Cassirer stresses an important aspect of Husserl’s phenomenological approach, which is able to provide not only a reflection on the process of constitution of scientific objects, but also an analysis of different domains of objectivities and acts of meaning that constitute and shape the cultural dimension. The aim is to establish an eidetics of culture capable of overcoming the pitfalls of a “genetic-psychological framing of the question [of myth]” (ibid.), while granting a transcendental foundation of a theory of culture, that is, more generally, the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*).

However, for Cassirer, and this is the key point, Husserl never set himself such a goal. In his words, “no attempt of this sort has been undertaken either in phenomenology or in mythological research” (ibid.). Certainly, Cassirer’s judgment is limited in that passage to the problem of the analysis of mythical thought. However, in those words we can identify a clear statement on the substantial differences which, according to Cassirer, still continue to exist between the method of his critique of culture and Husserl’s phenomenology. But can it be considered as a final judgment on the possibility of relating Husserl’s phenomenology and Cassirer’s philosophy of culture?

Almost a century after Cassirer wrote these words, we are in a position to state otherwise – at least as far as Husserl, and not phenomenology in general, is concerned. The publication of the research manuscripts and lectures from the estate in the critical edition *Husserliana* since 1950 proves that during most of his life Husserl put great effort into establishing a foundation of the humanities. Indeed, phenomenology itself can be seen as a more or less implicit answer to this problem, which in turn explicitly informs Cassirer’s philosophy. At the same time, the

editorial work on Cassirer's posthumous works since 1995 allows access to new material that leads to the emergence of new problems and justifies the possibility of a renewed discussion of Husserl's phenomenology.

In light of this new research material, a noticeable body of literature has attempted a comparison between the philosophies of Husserl and Cassirer since the turn of the last century.⁴ These studies have shown the fruitfulness of such a comparison, while covering a wide range of issues: from the more general question about the compatibility of the methods of Husserl's phenomenology and Cassirer's analysis, to more specific problems concerning their respective conceptions of the nature and role of intuition, their theories of perception, their theories of meaning, and their philosophical understanding of science.

For sure, among the various analyses attempted, one of the most central has been precisely the comparison between Husserl's phenomenology and Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Several studies have investigated the problem of the relationship between phenomenological analysis and Cassirer's transcendental method through the analysis of cultural objects (Holzey 1991; Möckel 1992; 2004; Luft 2004; 2011; de Warren 2015), the role of intentionality in the conceptualization of meaning in several cultural spheres (Orth 2013a), the relationship between perception and culture (Orth 1999; Bosch 2002; Bernet 2010), to the relationship between the philosophy of culture and humanism (Orth 2003b). However, a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised by their analyses of culture has been addressed only in part by scholars in the German-speaking world and not at all in English-speaking academia.

This volume aims to fill this gap within the domain of research on Husserl and Cassirer by assembling contributions by leading international scholars and young

⁴ Examples of comparative research on Husserl and Cassirer can be found from the 1940s onwards (see Kaufmann 1949). However, an in-depth analysis of the texts does not emerge until the 1990s, when a rebirth of studies on neo-Kantianism in general, and on Cassirer's philosophy in particular, takes place in Europe and culminates in 1995 with the beginning of the publication of the critical edition of Cassirer's works by Oswald Schwemmer, Klaus Christian Köhnke, and John Michael Krois. From the same period originate the pioneering studies of Ernst Wolfgang Orth, Oswald Schwemmer, and Christian Bermes (among others), who all take into account various elements of contact and contrast between Husserl's and Cassirer's philosophies. Since the 2000s, this line of research has been developed further thanks to publications such as Besoli and colleagues 2002, Capeillères 2002, Makkreel and Luft 2009, Plümacher 2004, and Choi 2007, to name just a few.

researchers. The aim is to provide an overview of different approaches to the study of culture based on the philosophies of Husserl and Cassirer.

Irene Breuer focuses on the analysis of aesthetic experience in both thinkers. Her chapter first addresses Husserl's differentiation between perceptual apprehension and phantasy apprehension as developed in *Logical Investigations*, *Ideas I*, and *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*. The second part delves into Cassirer's conception of symbolic forms, focusing on the concepts of symbolic ideation and pregnancy, and eventually outlining Cassirer's understanding of the differences between representation and expressive meaning. Breuer stresses the common ground of Husserl's and Cassirer's accounts on the process of perception, which leads both to emphasize the richness of perception as inexhaustible source of sensuous meaning.

Andrea Carroccio offers an in-depth discussion of Cassirer's criticism of Husserl's distinction between hyletic and noetic elements of experience developed in his exposition of the problem of pregnancy in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. To do this, Carroccio begins by providing a broad overview of Cassirer's theory of pregnancy relating it to his theory of concept formation, as it is developed in his earlier work *Substance and Function*. Focusing on the convergences and differences between Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and Cassirer's *Substance and Function*, Carroccio argues that Husserl and Cassirer develop substantially different theories of concept formation and that this is one fundamental element that justifies their different attitudes towards the philosophy of culture.

Daniel Herbert focuses on the relationship between Husserl's *Crisis* and Cassirer's analysis of mythical phenomena in *The Myth of the State*. Despite the obvious differences in the approaches and the objects of investigation, these two works display crucial similarities. The historical background for both works is characterized by the fear of the Nazi party's seizure of power as well as by the common call to reason as humans' fundamental compass. According to Herbert, a further element of comparison is given by their acquaintance and critical stance towards Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Eventually, Husserl and Cassirer may be understood to share a common Platonistic and Kantian agenda which seeks to preserve the cultural prestige of intersubjective reason against calls for its replacement by mythical forms of understanding.

Dieter Lohmar provides an in-depth analysis of Husserl's project of a foundation of the humanities. His reflections are based on the newly edited manuscripts

of the second volume of *Ideas*, which provide a revealing insight into Husserl's phenomenological approach to the problems of a philosophy of culture. After a survey of the topic in light of the original project of *Ideas*, with particular attention to the issue of the constitution of cultural objects, the chapter delineates Husserl's notion of an 'eidetics of the mind' that serves as the basis for a phenomenological foundation of the humanities. In a final section, Lohmar exemplifies the implementation of this endeavor by proposing an elementary hermeneutics of bodily understanding intended to provide a phenomenological analysis of one of the most fundamental pillars of human culture for both Husserl and Cassirer, namely, communication.

Peter Mahr concentrates on Husserl's and Cassirer's conceptions of the role of the ideal in their philosophies of art and the arts. The chapter offers a profound analysis of the place of art in Cassirer's philosophy of culture as well as Husserl's phenomenology. The starting points for Mahr's reconstruction of Cassirer's understanding of the arts are *The Logic of the Humanities* and *An Essay on Man*. The reconstruction of his symbolic and semiotic philosophy serves the purpose of showing the place of art in Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Additionally, Mahr provides the same contextualization for Husserl's phenomenology, highlighting the distinctive nature of ideality associated with the objects of art as compared to other types of cultural objects.

Bence Marosan offers a systematic comparison between Husserl's and Cassirer's understandings of mythical consciousness. For both authors, the mythical mind represents an original form of the human mind and serves as a foundation of cultural development and history. Marosan eventually argues that Husserl's and Cassirer's respective approaches may well be unified into a single phenomenological account of mythical subjectivity, which provides crucial cues for understanding the structure of subjectivity in general.

Christian Möckel delivers a comparison of Husserl's and Cassirer's analyses of the concept of expression. Special attention is paid here to the field of language, which, as means of human communication, lays the foundation for the constitution of culture. Möckel explains the relationship between sensible sign and meaning as well as the process of sense-bestowing (*Sinngebung*) in verbal and non-verbal linguistic phenomena, by referring to both Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Although it is possible to identify some

points of convergence in the investigations of the two philosophers, Möckel also shows that they still address the problem in ways that each stress different aspects.

Martina Plümacher identifies a common ground between Husserl's phenomenology and Cassirer's philosophy of culture regarding their humanistic ideal. Her analysis reveals the parallelism of Husserl's and Cassirer's argumentative strategies as set forth in *Crisis* and *Substance and Function*, respectively. Plümacher marks the starting point of both works in the critique of scientism and positivism, which provides the key to redefining the role of science in the context of culture, while also emphasizing its function as a tool for orientation along with other cultural forms. The emphasis here is on the historical context that provides the backdrop for Husserl's and Cassirer's reflections and in particular the rise of National Socialism, which had dramatic consequences for both men. The end point of their analyses is ultimately the recognition of the ideal as an element of orientation within culture and as a requirement for the realization of human freedom.

Benjamin Stuck considers the constitution of meaning in culture and society as an issue connecting Husserl and Cassirer. He integrates his analysis of the problem of meaning constitution by associating it with Alfred Schutz's discussion of the notion of appresentational relations. Stuck's aim is to provide a general framework for locating Husserl's and Cassirer's analyses of culture starting with the parallelism between Cassirer's theory of symbolic pregnance and Husserl's conception of sense formation. In particular, the interrelationship of meanings located in different regions or provinces of being is seen as a source of contact between the three philosophers and as a founding concept for a philosophy of culture.

Panos Theodorou makes the case for questioning Cassirer's and Husserl's philosophies of culture as sharing a similar progressive ideal of culture. Their approaches were inspired by Enlightenment ideals that proved insufficient because they were based on deficient theories of value. Theodorou sketches an alternative theory of culture which follows Wolfgang Köhler's theory of value. His paper is an original attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the relationship between organism and the sphere of meaning, integrating a critical and phenomenological approach on culture.

Yuliya Tsutserova starts from the problem of sense constitution in Cassirer's philosophy of culture and Husserl's phenomenology. The chapter begins by outlining Cassirer's theory of culture and meaning constitution as developed in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*. Tsutserova

compares Cassirer's analysis with Husserl's theory of a priori genesis developed in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. She finds a commonality across Cassirer's and Husserl's perspectives in their conception of the configuration of meaning as an infinitely open and productive field that actualizes the expressive possibilities of consciousness.

Jérôme Watin-Augouard investigates the relationship between Husserl's phenomenology and Cassirer's philosophy of culture starting from Cassirer's understanding of the problem of symbolism. He discusses Cassirer's and Husserl's theories of sense formation as developed in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and *The Origin of Geometry*, respectively. Their diverging understandings of the problem of sense formation is founded on different methodological approaches in the analysis of culture. While Cassirer's theory of symbolism is based on a regressive analysis of culture, Husserl's starting point is the act of the phenomenological *epoché* and reduction. This methodological gap allows Watin-Augouard to stress the profound differences regarding their conceptions of meaning formation and their different approaches to a philosophy of culture.

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Cassirer and Husserl on Aesthetic Lived Experience

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Abstract: For both Husserl and Cassirer, art moves us through the dynamics of aesthetic lived experience: we experience an intensification of our emotions and a concomitant privileged access to a vivid image of reality. But at first sight, Husserl's and Cassirer's views seem to diverge with respect to the issue of original lived experience. Cassirer charges Husserl with having 'dissected' the whole of experience into two parts, i.e., primary contents devoid of meaning and experiences grounded in intentionality, which is in fact an early and later-revised conception of Husserl's. In contrast, for Cassirer every actual experience indissolubly embraces both moments such that these experience-totalities are always the vehicle of meaning. Two interrelated questions arise at this point. First, whether and to what extent can sensuous forms express the world's sense and whether and how this involves concepts? This question concerns the possibility of aesthetic knowledge. Second, there is the question of whether the corresponding aesthetic experience bears an immediate meaning, i.e., about the aesthetic experience as a unitary expressive phenomenon. I argue that both the experience of expression in Cassirer and impressive feelings in Husserl are grounded on a deeper underlying level. This level is a pre-categorical level and concerns a sensuous excess with respect to conceptuality that gradually builds up from within the continuous process of sense formation. This is the level where any artistic symbolic form and thus, in Cassirer's terms, expressive symbolism is founded. This means that appearance can be conceived of as a unitary phenomenon of expression in itself and for us.

Keywords: Art, Aesthetic Experience, Sensuous and Categorical Intuition, Expression, Impression, Life, Meaning, Myth, Symbolic Forms, Symbolic Pregnancy, Passivity, Reality

1 Introduction

According to Cassirer's *An Essay on Man* (1944), art is "not an imitation but a discovery of reality" (143). It does not call forth any common sensuous perception, but rather an aesthetical perception or experience which "is pregnant with infinite possibilities which remain unrealized in ordinary sense experience" (ibid., 145). Art is thus an "intensification of reality" (ibid., 143). In Cassirer's view, aesthetic lived experience is "filled with the liveliest energies of passion" (ibid., 147), since art gives us not merely emotions, but "motion" (ibid., 149), thus setting our whole being in "vibration" (ibid., 150). Art moves us through the dynamics of aesthetic experience: we experience an intensification of our emotions and a concomitant self-liberation. Far from being passive spectators, we are led to "pass through the whole gamut of human emotions" (ibid., 149); to put it briefly, we come to 'resonate' with the work of art, such that in aesthetic lived experience our being and the work of art coalesce into an indivisible whole. Husserl would agree with this view to the extent that for phenomenology our relation to our surrounding world cannot be reduced to representation. On the contrary, our experiences are characterized by their openness, for intentionality discloses horizons that exceed the immediate actuality of any given thing.

But Husserl's and Cassirer's views seem at first sight to diverge with respect to the issue of the original lived experience. If we follow Cassirer, what is given is not to be reduced to a "merely sensuous [...] complex of sensory data" (Cassirer 1957b, 68) that is made meaningful by an act of apperception. Instead "expressive meaning attaches to the perception itself, in which it is apprehended and immediately experienced" (ibid.). For in terms of pure expression, an area of being is not simply apprehended in what it signifies for consciousness, but it rather belongs to a whole of reality where the boundaries between subjects and objects are fluid throughout and everything is interconnected in a "common atmosphere" (ibid., 72). This intertwining between nature and culture is not only characteristic of mythical thinking but rather pervades all sense perception as John M. Krois (1987, 53) argues. This intertwining, i.e., "this universal sympathy, itself preserves a hovering, strangely impersonal character" such that it requires "no reduction to a personal substrate, to an agent" (ibid.; cf. Cassirer 1957b, 71). This means any theory based on empathy is misleading insofar as it "reverses the phenomenal order" (Cassirer 1957b, 72). It "kills" perception by reducing it to a "complex of mere sensory

contents" in order to "reanimate" it afterwards "by the act of empathy" (ibid.). Cassirer charges Husserl with having "dissected" the whole of experience into two parts both in *Ideas I* and in the *Logical Investigations*: primary contents devoid of meaning on the one hand and experiences grounded in intentionality on the other (ibid., 198). This separation is imposed upon phenomena, thus making it impossible to grasp that which eludes meaning. In contrast, for Cassirer "every actual experience indissolubly embraces" both moments such that these "experience-totalities" (*Gesamterlebnisse*) are "always the vehicle of a meaning" (ibid., 199).

At this point, two interrelated questions arise: first, whether and to what extent sensuous forms can express the world's sense and whether and how this involves concepts. This question concerns the possibility of aesthetic knowledge. Second, there is the question of whether the corresponding aesthetic experience has an immediate meaning. This concerns aesthetic experience as a unitary expressive phenomenon. Husserl can provide us with the starting point for answering both questions. In this paper, I endeavor to show that both the passive pre-categorical process and the concomitant ensuing continuous process of sense formation endow the self-identical object with a surplus of sensuousness that exceeds and overruns categorical perception. According to this thesis, the aestheticization of this excess of sensuousness over conceptuality engenders a specific aesthetic knowledge which finds expression in affective lived experiences. This means that if we understand original affective experience as a unitary, sensuous-affective phenomenon of expression, in short, as an aesthetic lived-experience with its origin in the emotions and feelings aroused by the original excess of sensuousness, then, I suggest, not only can Cassirer's criticism be mitigated, if not rebutted, but we can provide foundations for aesthetic experience and thus for Cassirer's conception of expressive symbolism.

In order to establish this thesis, I will first discuss Husserl with a view to shedding light on the differences between perceptual apprehension and phantasy apprehension. The second part delves into Cassirer's conception of symbolic forms, his conception of symbolic ideation and pregnance and then concludes by analyzing the concepts of representation and expressive meaning. This analysis should allow us, first, to address Cassirer's criticism of Husserl and, second, to single out a specific aesthetic knowledge and experience lying at the conjunction between Husserl's concept of an 'impressive lived-experience,' which expresses itself in aesthetic feelings, and the Husserl-inspired concept of a sensuous excess of

experience proposed here. Such an aesthetic lived experience gives us privileged access to a rich, perceptual, and vivid image of reality and leads us to reassess its meaning.

2 Husserl's Theory of Hyletic Data – Affective, Hyletic Experience

In his early writings, especially in the *Logical Investigations* (Husserl 2001a) and in *Ideas I* (Husserl 1982), Husserl distinguishes two moments really inherent in the *noesis* itself. While the 'sensuous *hyle*' or 'formless stuff' is a non-intentional material or sense data, the *morphé* or 'stuffless forms' are intentional or apprehensional formations. Husserl conceives of hyletic data according to the apprehension – content of apprehension schema (*Auffassung-Auffassungsinhalt*), as Cassirer duly criticized. Thus, for Husserl, "sensuous data present themselves as stuffs for intentional formings or sense-bestowings, belonging to different levels" – in particular, "we find those sensuous moments overlaid by a stratum, which [...] bestows sense" (Husserl 1982, 203f.). Even though the sensuous data also includes the volitional and the emotional, taken in themselves, they have no presentational function which means they have to be 'animated' by the sense-bestowing apprehension. Hyletic data as such are devoid of meaning, as Cassirer rightly remarked.

Husserl revises this conception in his late writings, namely in the *Bernau Manuscripts* (Husserl 2001c) and *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis* (Husserl 2001b), where he delves into the realm of original affection and its sources. The most primitive experience is not motivated by an active performance: it rather begins at the level of hyletic data, which become connected to one another and thus build up homogeneous "affective [hyletic] units" in the "living present" (ibid., 210). Affection is built up by a so to speak "blind" unity of constitutive characters that originate in feelings (ibid., 278). A hyletic blending is produced within each of the sensuous fields from out of the time-continuum. These hyletic data have their origin in the proto-hyle, which is not a mere content of apprehension understood as a "pure affective nothingness" that needs to be "animated" by an intentional apprehension, but rather a *hyle* endowed with an "affective vivacity" (ibid., 214). This *hyle* produces an "affective relief" composed of data with varying affective efficacies that "exist for the ego only insofar as it affects me, the ego" (ibid., 210).

In the *Bernau Manuscripts* Husserl understands this original affectivity of the *hyle* or this ‘sensuousness devoid of Ego’ as an ‘original vitality,’ a ‘universal drive-intentionality,’ or ‘intentionality of instinctual drive’ (*Triebintentionalität*) consisting of affections of the Ego and its passive ‘being attracted’ to. By the term ‘Ego’ Husserl means a pole of stimuli “without name,” which is “not-being” but only “function[s]” through touching, handling, assessing, etc. (Husserl 2001c, 275). This pole of stimuli is nothing else than our lived body, for it is the lived body which senses hyletic data pertaining to the synesthetic or sensuous fields. The origin of hyletic data may be body-exogenous, like the sense-qualities of what is perceived – color, smell, sound, etc. – or body-endogenous like pain, hunger or sweating, to name just a few examples.¹ Despite their different origins, both ‘types’ of hyletic data exhibit a similar affective vivacity that is immediately and pre-reflectively sensed by the lived body. They both thus belong to the synesthetic field or primary sensuousness. In turn, this primary sensuousness owes its vitality to drive-intentionality or “passive proto-intentionality” (Husserl 2006, 335), which we may call *bodily intentionality* since it consists of sensuous stimuli and the correlative passive reaction of the body as irritability. This sphere of primary sensuousness is composed of passive associative and reproductive tendencies. Only the affective power of the *hyle* can produce the strong and vivid drives or sensuous tendencies that make up the “affective force” (Husserl 2001b, 223) of the primal impression.

What Husserl means by this term is the force with which the objects of experience call for our attention, i.e., their “affective allure” (ibid., 210). Husserl stresses the significance of this as follows: it is “the accomplishment of hyletic passivity that fashions a constant field of pre-given object-like formations for the ego [...]. Affective unities must be constituted in order for a world of objects to be constituted in subjectivity at all” (ibid.). For without affection “there would be no objects at all and no present articulated with objects” (ibid., 213). Therefore, subjectivity and a world of objects can only be constituted by recourse to this passive sphere of affection. Moreover, at the lowest level of passivity, the affective allure stemming

¹ Shaun Gallagher views the first type as objective sense-qualities that are the product of abstraction and transcendent to consciousness. He distinguishes them from the latter type, the proper “hyletic experience” that belongs to the body as it is lived and that denotes the “unitary synesthetic field” (Gallagher 1986, 140f.). In my view, however, both ‘types’ of hyletic data belong to the same sphere of original sensuousness insofar as they are both affections of the body.

from the environing-world is constitutive of sense: “Any kind of constituted sense is pre-given insofar as it exercises an affective allure, it is given insofar as the ego complies with the allure and has turned toward it attentively, laying hold of it.” (Ibid., 210) What is at stake here is, as László Tengelyi (2007, 346–349) puts it, an “experiential event [*Erfahrungsgeschehen*],” which, insofar as it precedes any difference between object and subject or consciousness, not only sets the conditions for their actual emergence, as Husserl claims, but also stimulates consciousness to new formations of sense (Tengelyi 2014, 193f.). What Husserl aims to describe is an “awakening event [*Weckungsereignis*]” (Tengelyi 2007, 132) from which the original affection and an awakening intention towards the ego arise (Husserl 2001b, 203). We react with varying degrees of attraction and repulsion in response to these affections. These reactions manifest the power of drives, which govern our affective bodily responses.

With this Husserl revises the views expressed in his *Ideas I* and his *Logical Investigations*. He had claimed there that the acts of valuing have no material of their own but are based on diffuse sensations that must be subjected to objectivation. At this later stage Husserl comes to realize that already in the sphere of passive intentionality the most basic sensuous feelings are able to ground an apperception of value, as Ullrich Melle has noted (Melle 2002, 87; cf. Ms. A VI 12 II, 22a, as quoted by Melle). This apperception of value is not expressed in predicative judgments but in bodily affections (e.g., attraction or repulsion). Hence, already at this early stage, i.e., even before any predicative judgment takes hold of the object, the acts of emotion constitute objectivations: the beauty of an immanent color sensation as the content of sensation is correlative with the sensuous feelings of delight or desire as the material of sensation. Thus, we find the basis for the clarification of aesthetic lived experience in the exposition of the whole process that starts from the affective force of what is given to experience, passes through the sensuous feelings engendered by it and culminates in the positing of value expressed by our bodily affective responses.

3 Husserl: Aesthetic Lived Experience – Impressional Experiences

Husserl discusses aesthetic experience in the analyses of the aesthetic-artistic features of image consciousness and phantasy published in *Phantasy, Image*

Consciousness and Memory (Husserl 2005). The aesthetic attitude is defined as the “interest in the appearance” and this is contrasted with the “interest in the subject” characteristic of objective apprehension (ibid., 168). Aesthetic consciousness endows the appearing object with an “aesthetic,” emotional “coloration” (ibid., 462) as well as an “aesthetic character” (ibid., 709) insofar as “what is essential for the aesthetic attitude [...] is [...] the focusing on what interests me aesthetically, the objectivity in its How” (ibid., 710). Husserl emphasizes that “aesthetic interest aims at the presented object in the How of its presentedness, without interest in its existence itself” (ibid., 704). In the aesthetic attitude, we are neither interested in reality nor in “depictiveness; it is rather a matter of imaging in the sense of perceptual phantasy understood as immediate imagination” (ibid., 616). Hence, in the “fictionalizing experience,” in the attitude in which we are immersed in the image, the world of experience is suspended (ibid., 619). What art offers us is “an infinite wealth of *perceptual fictions*” (ibid., 620) because the worlds of phantasy “are absolutely free worlds” (ibid., 642). Consequently, their “horizon of indeterminacy” is not a horizon that could be preconfigured by means of memories and expectations. What is peculiar to these worlds of phantasy is their “unconditioned arbitrariness” (ibid.). On the one hand, this arbitrariness consists in the fact that the phantasy that determines this quasi-world is only restricted to the essential style of its horizon for the sake of harmony which, however, is possible “in infinitely many ways and *at one’s pleasure*” (ibid., 643). But on the other hand, arbitrariness implies that the person phantasizing can “creatively reshape, can create ever new worlds” or even recreate a given world that is in conflict with one fashioned previously (ibid.).

In worlds of phantasy, it is not only the ontological principle of similarity – or depictiveness – that is put into question, but the logical principle of non-contradiction is also suspended. Even though these basic principles that rule and norm our living world are no longer valid, Husserl stresses that artworks have their objectivity (ibid., 620). Despite being forced upon us by the artist, they are intersubjectively valid and possess a value. Any work of art is “an individual” “objective” idea in its “spiritual content” (ibid., 656). This idea has its temporality, namely, its origin in artistic expression, which “makes something ideal accessible and identifiable intersubjectively” (ibid., 656). Consequently, each idea in union with an expression is something “beautiful in itself, something full of objective value – [it] is, objectively, a *work*” (ibid., 657). A work of art is *per definitionem* beautiful: “All

art is 'aesthetic'; it is delight in what is seen *in concreto*" (ibid., 654). Art allows us to transgress the limits of our everyday experience, it allows the transcending of it, giving thus access to the world of ideas. Art can be

[...] idealistic, normative, portraying the ideal and transfiguring it through beauty. In a still higher stage, art can also be philosophical, metaphysical, elevating one to the idea of the good, to the deity through beauty, to the deepest world-ground, uniting one with it (ibid.).

Art triggers a transcending experience. Far from being an imperfect imitation of the ideal world, art mediates between our sensitivity and the world of ideas, giving us access to the supreme idea, that of the good. Hence, art has a normative/ethical function.

Concerning aesthetic experience, Husserl claims that, contrary to perceptive experience where the ego is conscious of the affecting determinations of the object itself and lives "*in the respective positing of existence*," "*living in aesthetic consciousness*" means that "I live in feelings" that are directed toward "*what is merely presented*" in the manner of its appearing and not toward "*what is taken to be actual*" (ibid., 463). This manner of appearing "is the bearer of aesthetic feeling-characteristics" arising from the "aesthetic coloration" that the ego ascribes to the object. The aesthetic value is therefore not something immanent to the object itself, but is subject-relative. In such an aesthetic experience, "the feeling is there impressionally" since the *Ego* experiences an "actual aesthetic feeling" (ibid., 465) or pleasure along with an "existential delight" (ibid., 462) in the manner of appearing. '*Living in feeling*' is twofold: On the one hand, it means 'turning toward' the manner of appearing; on the other hand, it means 'thematic primacy,' implying that even if we turn to the object to 'take cognizance of it,' the aesthetic attitude has primacy, i.e., beauty is the theme of consciousness. This is due to the fact that when something is perceived, it pleases or displeases, it is something reached for or desired. When a feeling belonging to sensuousness – namely, pleasure, or delight – is grounded on perceptual positing, a new object is constituted along with this feeling, specifically "the posited object as affective object" (ibid., 492). Even though feelings are "not position takings in the genuine sense" (ibid., 548), the act of feeling enables a twofold positing: it not only produces "a new positional experience" but it posits a new object along with its affective quality and affective value (ibid., 492). Here we

have two positings concerning the object: one of the object itself, the other of its “affective value” (ibid.), since pleasure bestows the value of what is pleasing to the senses on the object, i.e., beauty.

Hence, affective acts are the subjective response to the sensuous apprehending of the object. As such they are “value” or “categorical intuitions” (ibid., 492). However, sensuous apprehension as such, i.e., the impressive experience, belongs to passivity and to the sphere of “sensuous consciousness” (ibid., 494). Husserl stresses that sensuous apprehending itself involves an activity, it is not merely a presenting (ibid., 494), but instead a “living production of presentations” which, after being engendered, can be grasped as such in reflection (ibid., 492 fn.). As we have seen in the case of hyletic experience, these primitive feelings such as pleasure, displeasure, and so on are ascribed to the sphere of passivity, which means that already at this early stage the object is endowed with an affective quality and an affective value that ultimately triggers a bodily-driven response. In my view, there is an *affective intentionality* at play that links my sensitivity to the thing presented such that aiming at the object implies not a neutral turning toward the object but an *affective interchange*. The object has a certain allure for me, while my awakened pleasure addresses the object and bestows an affective value on it. We may conclude that there is a specific kind of position-taking, which is both impressional, insofar as it belongs to the lived (*erlebt*) experience, and bodily determined, as it concerns the sphere of hyletic passivity.

Husserl conceives of these ‘impressive feelings’ as belonging to non-intentional or ‘primary’ ‘sensuous experiences (sensual experiences),’ to put it briefly, to ‘impressionable experiences,’ that is to say, an unmodified, presenting experience in which an individual presents itself originally. The term ‘impression,’ however, carries wider and narrower meanings, as John B. Brough emphasizes. Broadly speaking, impressions refer to the original consciousness in which ‘an originary present, any originary now’ becomes constituted. Within that original consciousness, impression can also refer to the “impressionable experiences” from which an act of meaning becomes established in time consciousness (ibid., 381). Impression is thus “the name for the experiencing, for the internal consciousness in which the experience as an individual becomes constituted” (ibid., 402f.). The impression should be clearly distinguished from reproduction: While the impression is the “actual experiencing” (ibid., 403) and signifies “givenness in person” and “intuitedness” (ibid., 525), reproduction is “the re-presentation of the experience” (ibid., 334). In a reproductively conscious experience, the object is “inactually [*inaktuell*] given (given as hovering before us)”

(ibid., 405). We are reproducing, i.e., representing a past experience. In contrast, contemplating an image for the first time implies first turning toward it, not only in an objectivating but in a feeling and willing mood. This intentional experience “sinks back into passivity” (ibid., 552) where the primal impression of this experience, the primal sensation, establishes itself originally (ibid., 665). For Husserl, “impression” is hence equivalent to sensing or sensation: “*Impression* can be [...] the name for the *experiencing*, for the internal consciousness in which the experience as an individual becomes constituted” (ibid., 403). In summary, all actual experiences, including aesthetic experiences, are originally constituted impressionally in internal time consciousness. As such, it seems that “sensation or impression is the original consciousness of an act,” as Brough (2005, LXV) concludes.

But in my view, the aesthetic impression or sensation is not to be reduced to the consciousness of any act. On the contrary, impressional experiences are already informed by meaning for consciousness. There is no need for an intentional conscious apprehension in order to constitute an impression, since it is itself already animated by an affective sense. This affective sense is awakened by the hyletic experience that in turn engenders an impression. The aesthetic impression in particular involves an awakening experience of a special nature, insofar as it is the allure of the object that calls for my attention and triggers my affective response. It is through the affection exercised on my sensitivity by the object that an affective reaction ensues: pleasure, joy, their negative counterparts, and so on. These are the feelings through which the subject is able to ‘read’ the object – Husserl (2005, 408) speaks of ‘reading’ someone’s rage “in his face” – and thus endowing it with an affective sense prior to any categorial formatting. What the subject apprehends is both the affective quality of the aesthetic object – i.e., its beauty or ugliness – and its possible ideal value. We may then conclude that Husserl finds the basis for aesthetic experience in the immediate givenness of an impressive feeling experience. I will later discuss the sense and extent to which this experience is meaningful.

4 Cassirer’s Phenomenology of the Pure Events of Expression

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1957), Cassirer analyzes the symbolic forms of language, myth, science, religion, art, and technology, and the symbolic

function that is common to all forms. These symbolic forms are the product of different modes of “signification” or “meaning-giving” (*Sinngebung*) and of a specific “attitude of consciousness” or “comportment of consciousness” (*Verhalten des Bewußtseins*): “the perceptive,” the “intuitive,” and the “cognitive” (Cassirer 1957b, 57). He further distinguishes three “steps” or “dimensions” of meaning within the process of symbolic formation: expression (*Ausdruck*), representation (*Darstellung*), and pure significance (*reine Bedeutung*), which cannot be reduced to either of the two dimensions mentioned before (ibid., 448). This allows him to differentiate the world of expression, the perceptual world of representation and the world of theory. Expression is the most elementary dimension because

[...] it does not admit of a difference between image and thing, the sign and what it designates. In expression there is no cleavage between the mere sensuous existence of a phenomenon and a spiritual-psychic meaning which it mediately divulges. It is essentially an utterance (ibid., 93).

All the symbolic forms operating in myth and art “remain on the soil of primary, [...] expressive experiences” (ibid., 449). Signs acquire a representative function when they are used to affirm or negate some propositional content (ibid., 109). The “is” of the copula is the prime example of this function and its articulation in language (ibid., 450). Just as this “world of representation” disengages itself from that of mere expression, so “ultimately a world of pure meaning grows out of the world of representation,” thus constituting the form of scientific knowledge (ibid.). Whereas the expressive and representative functions are related to the intuitive world, the significative function is purely conceptual. Language thereby becomes a “purely symbolic expression,” i.e., “an autonomous formation of the human spirit” (ibid., 451). Hence, each of the aforementioned attitudes are governed by a different symbolic form: expressive perception is related to myth, representational intuition to language, and signification-ruled cognition to science. These symbolic forms define the realm of objective spirit (ibid., 57). As such the symbol is the concrete or individual as endowed with meaning or signification. Cassirer defines this term as the junction of both realms: we should understand the term “symbolic form” as “every energy of mind [*Energie des Geistes*] through which a mental content of meaning [*geistiger Bedeutungsgehalt*] is connected to a concrete,

sensory sign [*konkretes, sinnliches Zeichen*] and made to adhere internally to it" (Cassirer 1994, 79).

Hence, for Cassirer perception is an intersubjective mode of activity that characterizes the intertwinement of subjects and world and thus permeates every symbolic function of expression. What perception grasps is always a symbolic form, i.e., something concrete given to our senses that is always embedded in meaning. Thus, the perceived object is already expressive such that we never encounter something that has not been formed by the objective spirit. Given the correlation between symbolic comportment and symbolic forms, Rudolf Bernet (2010, 43) rightly claims that the hermeneutic analysis of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has a "circular path" that prevents us from retrieving the origin of objective culture. This is tacitly acknowledged by Cassirer (1957b, 22f.) when he says that to "pass through the stratum of mere symbol and signification to apprehend the immediate, unveiled reality behind it," requires no "outward' experience," but is to be sought for "in ourselves," in our "existential [experiential] reality" (*Erlebniswirklichkeit*).

In opposition to Husserl and to sensualism, Cassirer claims that the "ultimate element of all reality," i.e., "original perceptions" (ibid.), do not "dissolve into a mere complex of sensuous qualities [...] but is always attuned to a specific expressive tone" (ibid., 67). To disregard this is to neglect not only the subjective symbolic or "intellectual functions," but also the expressive nature of the "instinctive substrate" (ibid., 66) that underlies it. It is for this reason that he criticizes Husserl's conception of *hyle* and *morphé* and their possible synthesis as detailed in *Ideas I*. A symbolic form manifests itself and "requires no determinate substrate for it" (Cassirer 1959b, 74). This means that *hyle* and *morphé* should not be hypostatized and substructured as a layer grounding experience, since every experience encompasses both in unity. For Cassirer, there are only "total experiences," (ibid., 199) whereas a primary given deprived of a noetic apprehension is a nonsense. Perception grasps the world in "a definite 'character,'" be it "gloomy or joyful, agitating or soothing, pacifying or terrifying," determinations that intrinsically belong to the phenomena themselves (ibid., 72). Cassirer thus departs from an "original phenomenon of expression and expressive understanding," for the reality we experience is embedded within a "living efficacy" and not given by the mere "datum of sensation" (ibid., 73). This phenomenon of meaning cannot be reduced to language nor is it solely the product of culture, even though agreement

is possible only in its medium. On the contrary, meaning is already perceived through the senses:

We can understand how a sensuous particular, such as the spoken sound, can become the vehicle of purely intellectual meaning, only if we assume that the basic function of signification [*Grundfunktion des Bedeutens*] is present and active before the individual sound is produced, so that this producing does not create signification, but merely stabilizes it, applies it to the particular case (Cassirer 1957a, 106).

This is why Cassirer distinguishes between “artificial” and “natural symbolism” (ibid., 105f.). Things are always seen or experienced through a symbolic form. They are the product of a symbolic formation that assigns artificial signs of culture to the natural symbolism found in our perception of the world. The first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* shows in paradigmatic fashion that language and linguistic sciences fulfil a mediating function between natural and cultural sciences. This still holds today, as Gerald Hartung (2012, 362) emphasizes. The question of their respective limits is the concern of the human sciences, whose context, in Cassirer’s time, was that of Darwinism, Monism and Kantianism (ibid., 363).

Cassirer (1996, 199) conceives of a symbolic form as a “life-whole” (*Lebens-Ganzheit*) which shows itself in the “primary phenomenon of expression” (*Urphänomen des Ausdrucks*), thus as a “manifestation of a spiritual whole (*seelischen Ganzen*, trans. mod.) to which it belongs”. As Krois (1995, 303, 319) remarks, “*Urphänomen*” is a Kantian term, but Cassirer uses it to characterize the limits of explanation, due to the impossibility of attributing a causal explanation to sensuous phenomena. Insofar as they are intersubjectively constituted and pregiven to us, we may understand them as primal (symbolic) facts in the Husserlian sense (cf. Breuer 2020a).

Cassirer (1957b, 57) takes his point of departure “from the problems of the objective spirit, from the formations in which it consists and exists”. He does not view them as “a mere fact” nor reduces them to a primal unity, but views the factum as plural, as Sebastian Luft (2015, 133) stresses. Thus, instead of an ultimate foundation, we encounter a plurality of cultural forms, a plurality of “contexts of meaning” (ibid., 132) and a correlative plurality of subjective meaning-giving

comportments. Unlike Husserl, Cassirer is not interested in reducing what is perceptually given to unveil the primary data of sensation, stripping it bare of any cultural presuppositions and any meaning content whatsoever. What Cassirer (1957b, 57) attempts is to find the “conditions of [...] possibility” of the experience of these symbolic formations. These a priori conditions of experience are always culturally embedded such that even space and time as forms of intuition (*Anschauung*) are themselves invested with religion, myth, science, etc. (ibid., 286). As Luft (2015, 167; 2019, 133) remarks, Cassirer’s account is a transcendental one because the conditions of possibility of the experience of any object are forms of intuition that, in contrast to Kant, are always not only symbolic, i.e., meaningful, but plural. Intuition thus grasps symbolic forms, which are culturally shaped.

In this regard, Cassirer emphasizes that perception in the sense of an “intuition as a whole” (*Anschauung als Ganzes*) is a “vision” (*Sehen*) which is constituted by the act of “symbolic ideation” (*symbolische Ideation*):

For there is no seeing and nothing visible which does not stand in some mode of spiritual vision, of ideation. A seeing and a thing-seen outside of this “sight,” a “bare” sensation preceding all formation, is an empty abstraction. The “given” must always be taken in a definite aspect and so apprehended, for it is this aspect that first lends it meaning. This meaning is to be understood neither as secondary and conceptual nor as an associative addition: rather, it is the simple meaning of the original intuition itself (Cassirer 1957b, 134).

A few lines later, Cassirer adds that “it is only in and through” ideation as “the mode of vision [...] that the signification of the thing seen is determined” (ibid., 135). Clearly making reference to Husserl, he remarks that however far we may reduce the phenomenon we never reach “mere ‘sensation’ without any intuitive articulation” (ibid.). Every phenomenon is not only “present” but also “representative” insofar as it is given as “a member of a species” in a certain order and sequence and according to a context (ibid., 136). This ‘seeing’ is thus not reduced to an intuitive perception in Husserl’s sense, but is ‘representative,’ ideal and a priori, i.e., mediated by a concept.

This ideation is thus already a “primary achievement of the concept,” a frame that makes “interpretation” possible, and it is aimed at the fixation of the “lawful

order” pertaining to the phenomena themselves by the “logical concept” (ibid., 286). Thus, the ‘mere intuitive idea’ of the form of a physical object determines the concept ‘condensed of multiple sensuous intuitive images.’ Hence, intuition is more than the “immediate relation to the object” in Husserl’s sense, it is rather “discursive” (ibid., 288) insofar as it aims at a never achieved totality by construing an “intuitive synthesis” alongside a path opened and ruled by the concept (ibid., 289). In the wake of Kant, Cassirer (1997, 162) stresses the “creative and constructive moment” of the forming synthesis (*bildende Synthese*), since “no appearance (*Erscheinung*) can be ‘apprehended’ [...] before it is formed and determined by the basic forms of pure reason (*Grundgestalten des reinen Bewusstseins*).” It is important to notice that an individual sensuous moment is intuitively and immediately grasped as representative such that “the represented totality of sense” is cognized and “seen” as an ideal totality, as Christian Möckel (2010, 116) duly emphasizes. This is because, for Cassirer, sensory experience takes place from a symbolic viewpoint which determines the context within which the singularity has to be seen. The symbolic viewpoint determines not only the sense of what we experience but the manner in which we experience such that it establishes a frame within which experience takes place, which means the symbolic frame is an a priori condition of experience.

Actually, the concept does not simply provide a directive to intuition but is “a function of path finding itself” (Cassirer 1957b, 289). For Cassirer, the “power of the concept” (ibid.) lies in correlating intuition to the mode of correlation such that by way of the concept “the I turns from the objects apprehended in vision, toward the manner of the seeing, the character of vision itself” (ibid., 288). Hence, the concept is more than the Kantian “unity of the relation by which a manifold is determined as inwardly belonging together” (ibid., 298) insofar as “it sets up a definite direction and norm of *discursus*”: the concept designates the “point of view” under which any “manifold of contents” is to be apprehended (ibid., 299). The concept sets up the viewpoint for meaning, which “unfolds” what is already potentially contained in the forms of intuitive reality (ibid., 300).

But a closer examination of these statements reveals that the concept does more than merely actualizing a potential content: The concept as such opens new paths for intuition. This openness may imply the openness of meaning to changes and the historical evolution of symbolic forms: If the appearance of the phenomenon is marked by a symbolic order, which endows it with meaning, then a change in

the sensuous givens implies a change in the order of meaning and in the concept underlying it. Conversely, a change in the *Sicht* or ideation implies a change in the ‘reading’ of the phenomenon, such that the transformation of meaning brings about a change of the phenomenon itself. Symbolic forms, i.e., the union of sensuous givens with ideal, non-intuitive meaning, give shape to a totality of experience and, as such, they are contingent, subject to historical and cultural changes.

This “specific mode of reflection” is the source of the relevance of the concept within “the problem of symbolic formation” (ibid., 288). Thanks to the enriched function of the concept as described by the operation of symbolic ideation, perception is able to “spell out phenomena” and “read them as experiences” (ibid., 191). Phenomena represent a form, a meaningful articulated whole, and the forms compose “complexes of meaning” (ibid.). As Bernet (2010, 46) remarks, this *Sicht* or ideation “is a symbolic function or order” which binds itself to sensuous givens and forms a whole with them, i.e., “a phenomenon impregnated with its meaning.” Cassirer (1957b, 202) terms this interweavement of sensuous givens and forms “symbolic pregnancy”: “By symbolic pregnancy we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain nonintuitive meaning which it immediately and concretely represents.” Here again, Cassirer speaks of a sense experience, a meaning, and the way the former contains the latter. Later in the text, he defines symbolic pregnancy in terms of their coalescence:

We can grasp “meaning” only by referring it back to “intuition,” just as intuition can never be given to us otherwise than in regard to meaning. If we hold fast to this insight, the symbolic factor in our knowledge will no longer be in danger of splitting into an immanent and a transcendent component. The symbolic is immanence and transcendence in one, for in it a fundamentally supra-intuitive meaning is expressed in intuitive form. (Ibid., 385)

In a possible reference to Husserl, Cassirer emphasizes that what is meant here is not ‘a perceptive data on which apperceptive acts are later grafted’ but a perception already articulated in a ‘determinate order of meaning.’ The term “pregnancy” designates this “ideal interwovenness” of phenomenon and meaning (ibid., 46), of immanence and transcendence. Krois (1997, 54) argues that even though this definition resembles that of symbolic form, the term “does not involve or depend upon the giving of signs (*Zeichengebung*) or a giving of meaning (*Sinngebung*).”

Since the term “symbolic pregnance” refers to the “sensory in general,” it is rather the “condition of possibility” of all giving of signs or meaning and thus “the transcendental element in Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms” (ibid., 56).

Hence, what Husserl conceives of as a foundational order between sensuous intuition and categorial intuition is viewed by Cassirer as an inseparable unity, as a whole. Cassirer thus maintains that in experience we never encounter sensations detached from a mode or order of manifestation. This unity stands for a phenomenon that is in itself meaningful since it belongs to a totality of meaning, which is at the same time “a life ‘in’ meaning” (Cassirer 1957b, 46). Cassirer does not simply follow Kant in his assertion that intuition without concepts is blind but enlarges the realm of spontaneity to all the activities of symbolic formation that belong to cultural life. Nor does he endorse Husserl’s conception of intentionality (cf. Orth 1995, 51 for the opposite view), since the doctrine of symbolic pregnance is precisely regarded as refuting the distinction between the hyletic and the noetic strata. He even finds in Husserl “a vestige of that dualism that sees a cleavage between the physical and the psychic” (Cassirer 1957b, 198). For Cassirer, on the contrary, everything is always already in some context or field of meaning. If we are to speak in phenomenological terms, Cassirer continues, we must recognize that

[...] no content of consciousness is in itself merely present, or in itself merely representative; rather, every actual experience indissolubly embraces both factors. Every present content functions in the sense of representing, just as all representation demands a link with something present in consciousness. (Ibid., 199)

Cassirer takes the example of a melody heard at different times: the experiences may be “numerically and qualitatively different, [but they] are nevertheless directed toward the same thing; they represent the same object” (ibid.), i.e., the same melody. Representation mediates between an “immediate perception” and “memory,” which both coincide in their functional correlation (ibid.). Representation, as Bernet (2010, 48) remarks, “effaces the opposition between ‘presentation’ (*Gegenwärtigung*) and ‘re-presentation’ (*Vergegenwärtigung*) on which Husserl’s entire theory of perception rests.”

Thus, far from being a “faithful reflection and reproduction of the relations of the outside world” (Cassirer 1957b, 59), as empiricism maintains, representation consists

in the awareness of a similarity of the structural relationships that build up a form or *Gestalt*. For *Gestalt* psychology, the whole of a form is logically prior to its parts, such that “the whole does not originate in its parts, it constitutes them and gives them their essential meaning” (Cassirer 1957a, 103). “Every notion of part already encompasses the notion of the whole, not as to content, but as to general structure and form” (ibid., 102). Every particular part “expresses the rule of this complex” (ibid.). Parts are not isolated from one another but are related through an “intensive ‘being-mutually-conditioned’ [*intensives ‘Durch-einander-Bedingtsein’*]” (ibid., 103; trans. mod.). To sum up, parts and whole are related through representation insofar as each particular content is given only in reference to and in correlation with the whole and vice versa. Cassirer (1957b, 200) illustrates this thesis with the example of a line:

As we immerse ourselves in the design and construct it for ourselves, we become aware of a distinct physiognomic character in it. A peculiar mood is expressed in the purely spatial determination: the up and down of the lines in a space embraces an inner mobility, a dynamic rise and fall, a psychic life and being. And here we do not merely read our own inner states subjectively and arbitrarily into the spatial form; rather, the form gives itself to us as an animated totality, an independent manifestation of life. It may glide quietly along or break off suddenly; it may be rounded and self-contained or jagged and jerky; it may be hard or soft: all this lies in the line itself as a determination of its own reality, its objective nature.

However, these qualities change or vanish as soon as we consider the line as a geometrical structure or, aesthetically, as an ornament, or, from a “magical-mythical” viewpoint, as a “warning symbol” (ibid.). These examples show that *hyle* and *morphé* cannot be perceived in isolation, but rather as aspects that can vary independently of one another and under which lived experiences can be compared: as the example of the line has shown, the same materiality can be subjected to varying interpretations. The point of the example is that it is not only through the viewpoint, the “universal form of meaning,” that an object “first becomes possible” and is “made understandable” (ibid., 201), but also through its “relation to a total horizon”, i.e., through “a certain atmosphere in which it not merely ‘is,’ but in which, as it were, it lives and breathes” (ibid.). Cassirer would concur with Mikel Dufrenne’s (1973, 542) assertion that atmosphere is revealed to aesthetic feeling:

“Art invites us and trains us to read expression and to discover the atmosphere which is revealed only to feeling. Art makes us undergo the absolute experience of the affective.” It is the affective quality that makes the world of the aesthetic object expressive and endows it with symbolic meaning. The aesthetic object is thus saturated with meaning, which is “immanent in the sensuous, being its very organization” (ibid., 12). Hence, the atmosphere can be understood as the affective expression of reality (cf. Breuer 2020b, 340–347).

Cassirer (1944, 146) emphasizes however, that works of art are “neither merely representative nor merely expressive” nor “simply an outburst of passionate feeling;” they are “symbolic in a new sense” insofar as they are “an interpretation of reality – not by concepts but by intuitions; not through the medium of thought but through that of sensuous form.” That which the hermeneutic function of art reveals is “the dynamic process of life itself,” the formerly unknown depth and variety of the “motions of the human soul” (ibid., 148). Art moves us through our “susceptibility to the dynamic life of forms,” which we apprehend by “a corresponding dynamic process in ourselves” (ibid., 151). In aesthetic experience, by entering the realm of “living forms” we become absorbed “in the dynamic aspect of form” (ibid., 152). As Birgit Recki (2002, 205f.) remarks, this emphasis on life and liveliness of aesthetic experience differs from that of mythic experience, where the emphasis is placed on the totality or the universal sympathy between subjects and world, nature and culture. Myth is conceived of as the “original ‘form of life’” (Cassirer 1996, 19), as “the truly primordial level” where the “closeness to life” (ibid., 20) becomes clearly evident and out of which “higher” symbolic forms emerge (ibid.). Hence, the work of art has “a formative power” (Cassirer 1944, 149) that is twofold: to give an aesthetic form to the expression or interpretation of the dynamics of life on the one hand and to our passions on the other means transforming both, life and passions, into an “active state” (ibid.), by virtue of which we are able to grasp “the motion and vibration of our whole being” (ibid., 150). It is the function of the aesthetic image to express the living efficacy of mythic perception.

It now becomes clear that the reference to sensuous data alone does not suffice to disclose the perceived phenomenon. Sensuous data must be referred to a meaningful form, which thus fulfils a “sense-generating function” (*sinngenerierende Funktion*), as Philipp Dubach (1995, 50) rightly points out. According to *Substance and Function*, the “concept of form-quality” designates the connection of the “manifold presentational contents” into one form (Cassirer 1953a, 332). Cassirer

emphasizes that “the existence of such a structure and of the peculiar increase in content given with it is to be recognized as an empirical datum” (ibid., 333). He also generalizes the analyses of perception to embrace all contents of consciousness: “Not sensations but intuitions, not elements but formed totalities, comprise the data of consciousness” (Cassirer 1957b, 141). To sum up, between representation and intuition there is “a genuine relation of reciprocity:” intuition is required by representation, while intuition provides representation unceasingly with new aspects and forms them into a richer whole (ibid.).

No perception can thus be meaningless or outside a symbolic relationship. This is why for Cassirer “there is no form of ‘Being’ for us outside of these different kinds of action (in language, myth, religion, art, science) because there is no other form of determinacy” (Cassirer 1996, 223). There is therefore no split between a form of being and the intellectual functions; every givenness is already a “unity of function” (ibid., 225): the sensed givenness can only be grasped within a functional nexus. Hence, as Kreis (2010, 80) explains, contrary to “thing-ontology,” according to which concepts apply to substances and their accidents, in Cassirer’s “functional ontology,” “the properties of individual things are derived exclusively from the relations in which they stand.”

But what is the ‘symbolic’ itself? The symbolic in its proper sense is the “true mediation of the apparent opposition” (*Scheingegensatz*, trans. mod.) between “life and thought,” of traditional metaphysics (Cassirer 1996, 227). Life presents itself in symbolic forms by means of which we gain access to life neither through our “biological” *Dasein* nor through mere contemplation, but through our “free activity” (*freies Tun*), i.e., through “the creation of symbolic forms” (ibid., 228). Through this creation, life becomes a “self-conscious life” (ibid., 231). The negation of symbolic forms “would be therefore to simultaneously kill the mind [*Geist*] itself” (ibid.). Hence, for Cassirer our task as agents of culture is to create the symbolic forms by virtue of which our life can detach itself from any dependence upon a mere intuitive immediate reality and can attain the realm of spirit.

5 Cassirer: Aesthetic Lived Experience

Cassirer develops his conception of a sensuous experience on the basis of his understanding of aesthetic lived experience. In aesthetic lived experience, we ‘are

absorbed' in the 'immediate appearance' of art. It is a joyful experience that provides us with a "more profound insight" into the formal structure of reality (Cassirer 1944, 170). Aesthetic lived experience thus triggers a new orientation of our thoughts and feelings. Only art as a "genuine manifestation of our inner life" (ibid., 169) can "embrace and pervade the whole sphere of human experience [*Erfahrung*]" (ibid., 158).² In order to disclose this experiential reality, we have to grasp "the immediate, unveiled reality" (Cassirer 1957b, 22) in order to gain access to the world as "a phenomenon of pure expression," i.e., we must return to the stratum of expression for this is the ground for every theoretical construction (ibid., 62). Even though Cassirer refers here and in what follows to a specific mode of experiencing reality which corresponds mostly to mythical thinking, it is my contention that his reflections apply to aesthetic experience as well, since both attitudes concern precisely the same type of natural symbolism. Assuming this common origin would allow us to make up for the insufficiencies of theoretical foundation and systematicity that Marion Lauschke (2007, 183) and Andreas Graeser (1994, 87) respectively attribute to *An Essay on Man*. Cassirer (1944, 25) does in fact claim that art can be integrated into the philosophy of symbolic forms: "Man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net." "Symbolism" is a principle that he traces back to the "symbolic attitude of man" and to "the most fundamental stratum" of the "language of emotions" (ibid., 28f.). In this connection, Cassirer stresses that perception is always embedded with 'characters of expression' even where it is objectified. He adds:

It never dissolves into a mere complex of sensuous qualities – such as light or dark, cold or warm – but is always attuned [*gestimmt*] to a specific expressive tone [...] the character of the luring or menacing, the familiar or uncanny, the soothing or frightening (Cassirer 1957b, 67).

This expression "lies in this phenomenon purely as such and independently of its objective interpretation" (ibid.). Perception is thus never neutral but it is expressive

² The German version also mentions the sphere of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*): "*Die Kunst [vermag] die gesamte Sphäre menschlicher Erfahrung und menschlichen Erlebens zu erfassen und zu durchdringen.*"

by itself, even before the object is constituted as such. The 'how' in which something is given is thus prior to 'what' is given. In short, "the expressive meaning attaches to the perception itself, in which it is apprehended and immediately experienced" (ibid., 68). Cassirer seems to suggest that it is the object itself that is expressive, independently of its expression 'for us,' i.e., independently of our way of perceiving it. Cassirer apparently confirms this view when he claims that "the expressive character is not intrinsically subjective, since it is what gives to perception its original color of reality and makes it a perception of reality" (ibid., 73). As mentioned above, what we perceive is not a reality independent of us, we do not experience an isolated 'datum of sensation.' We access reality in "the original phenomenon of expression and expressive understanding" (ibid.). What we grasp is not the reality of any particular subject, but "a universal character of reality" that is "impersonal" (ibid., 74) insofar as it is anonymous, built up with intersubjectively and historically constituted symbolic forms: it is precisely in *An Essay on Man* that Cassirer stresses the intersubjective character of symbolic forms (cf. Lauschke 2007, 192), which are conceived of as forms "of a communal human existence" (Cassirer 1944, 63).

But the question still remains: How does this expressive symbolism come about? In other words, we still have to clarify the genesis of mythic-linguistic symbolism. Mythic language is, contrary to logical or discursive language, not rational or argumentative. As Krois (1997, 97) remarks, preconceptual meaning is the product of a primal predication at the level of expressive symbolism and pure expression, such as mythic rituality and bodily gestures. Cassirer does not conceive of the original form of predication as involving subsumption under concepts. On the contrary, it is defined in *Language and Myth* as "the creation of the category itself" (Cassirer 1953b, 88) and it comes about through imagination, not logic: all light is concentrated in one focal point of 'meaning,' while everything that lies outside these focal points of verbal or mythic conception remains practically invisible. It remains 'unremarked' because, and insofar as, it remains unsupplied with any linguistic or mythic 'marker' (ibid., 91).

What Cassirer in *Substance and Function* terms "concept form-quality" is now, in *Language and Myth*, named "radical metaphor" (ibid., 87) as the function of imagination. For Cassirer, in "mythic ideation" such "primitive mythic and linguistic concepts" constitute "punctiform units" or focal units that allow only qualitative determinations (ibid., 90). This means they are taken

not with respect to extension or quantity as in representation, but in intension (ibid.):

Every part of a whole is the whole itself, [...] the part does not merely represent the whole [...]; they are identical with the totality to which they belong [...] as genuine presences which actually contain the power, significance and efficacy of the whole (ibid., 91f.).

In pure expression parts and whole are identified with one another, every part expresses the perceived qualities of the whole. The same applies to any aesthetic experience, insofar as any part of the whole concentrates and compresses the given sense experience and the expressive signification of the whole: every part constitutes the intensification of expressive symbolism. Art is thus a “condensation,” “concentration” and “intensification” of reality (Cassirer 1944, 147f.). This experience is expressed by language through qualifying concepts that are infused with the dynamic factors stemming from the world of the human being’s activities and its emotional sphere: “Language arises not in isolation but in communal action. It possesses from the very start a truly common, ‘universal sense.’ Language as a *sensorium commune* could only grow out of the sympathy of activity” (Cassirer 1977a, 286), i.e., language mediates and results from the dynamic relation between nature and culture.

This pre-objective level, which is the level of expressive meaning, opens up the space of discursive meaning (language) and predication in which there is no merging of parts and whole, but a subsumption of the particular under the universal and hence representation. In representation, as mentioned above, the relationship between parts and whole changes: Every part expresses the structuring rule and the form of the whole, but not its meaning content. Representation is the process through which the subject transforms the sphere of unconscious drives, affections and expressive meaning into conscious, reflective acts by articulating them in discursive language. Cassirer (1957b, 77) concludes that it is “only in the medium of language” that the “infinite diversity, the surging multiformity of expressive experiences begin to be fixated; only in language do they take on ‘name and shape.’” In representation, signs do not imitate reality but structure perception and activity by activating knowledge and meaning, thus contributing to the “order of appearances,” as Martina Plümacher (2012, 186f.) points out. These different stages of

development are characterized by a progressive abstraction, as Oswald Schwemmer (1995, 41) remarks. Through the production of symbolic representations, we gain a theoretical access to the world and to higher forms of rationality and hence, to the dimension of pure significance.

What is required to grasp reality and its symbolic forms is thus a ‘hermeneutics of expression,’ as we may call it, that reveals not only how expressive symbolism has to be understood, but first of all, how this expressive character has been historically, i.e., genetically been built up. In other words, this hermeneutics should account for the constitution of the symbolic order of the sensuous phenomenon. Insofar as we never encounter sensuous givens devoid of meaning, hermeneutics addresses itself to an already meaningful givenness which is enmeshed in a network of references or representations (cf. Bernet 2010, 48f.). Hermeneutics thus means a disentangling of symbolic formations. Given that sensuous perception is always meaningful, as we have seen, nothing devoid of meaning can appear. This implies that something new that strikes our perception or that does not comply with the prevailing symbolic forms could hardly be perceived at all. Moreover, there would be no room for something utterly new. In any case, changing the symbolic forms so as to accommodate the new givenness requires a task of interpretation or transformation. This means that within this system of symbolic forms only a givenness that is somehow meaningful can be analogized with existing forms and thus be integrated into the system. Hence, there should be a core of meaning that, by remaining identical, sets the basis for such a task – a point that Husserl (1982, §§ 98f.) develops in *Ideas I*. The noematic core, for Husserl, represents the minimum of sense in order for the enrichment or transformation of sense to be possible at all.

It is precisely because Cassirer (1957b, 73) understands perception as already meaningful that the expressive character as discussed by Husserl seems to him to be a mere “subjective appendage” that is “accidentally added to the objective content of sensation.” He thus criticizes Husserl for having missed the “living efficacy” (*lebendige Wirksamkeit*) of the experience of apprehending the phenomena (ibid., 73). For Cassirer, to proceed in such a way is to “underestimate the part played in it not only by the ‘higher,’ intellectual functions, but also by the strong, instinctive substrate on which it rests” (ibid., 66). However, this criticism is only applicable provided that we just take into consideration Husserl’s early views. As we have already seen, in his later period Husserl does in fact recognize the expressive

function of sensuous givens as they are grasped in passive experience. But despite this concurrence, their approaches differ as to the origin of expression: while Husserl speaks of an affective appeal, i.e., a pre-predicative sensuous affection stemming from the perceived to which the subject passively submits, for Cassirer this allure is already charged with an expressive symbolic meaning and articulated in qualifying concepts.

In Cassirer, the active productive aspect of symbolism and language pervades all levels, even the preconceptual level where primal predication takes place, such that there is no sphere of mere passivity as Husserl understands it. This reading is confirmed by what Cassirer writes about the instinctive substrate: “All experience and expression are at first a mere passivity, a being-acted-upon rather than an acting – and this receptivity stands in evident contrast to that kind of spontaneity in which all self-consciousness as such is grounded” (ibid., 75). This passivity does not refer to the subject’s mere exposure to a world of affecting objects as in Husserl, but to a mythical thinking that operates in the subject’s mind without its being aware of it: self-consciousness and the world in general are the “result” (*Ergebnis*) of cultural processes, such that self-consciousness in Cassirer’s terms is symbolically mediated (Lauschke 2007, 222).

In mythical thinking and expressive symbolism in general, the subject is active: it re-enacts the sense of the expressive givenness, which in its turn ‘resonates’ in it. Cassirer distinguishes between three levels of aesthetic “objectivity” (*Gegenständlichkeit*) in his writings on Kant (Cassirer 2001; see Lauschke 2007, 202–207). The “aesthetic state” (*ästhetischer Zustand*) refers exclusively to the subject and its life-feeling: it concerns a “resonance of the whole into the particular and the individual” (*Resonanz des Ganzen im Besonderen und Einzelnen*) through which the subject comes to “the full possession of subjectivity itself [*in den vollen Besitz der Subjektivität selbst*]” (Cassirer 2001, 30). The second stage concerns the “intersubjective relationality of self-experience” (*intersubjektive Relationalität der Selbsterfahrung*) (Lauschke 2007, 203). The aesthetic object brings forth the unity of mood, which expresses not only the unity of our Ego, but also “our concrete life- and self-feeling” (*unser konkretes Lebens- und Selbstgefühl*) (Cassirer 2001, 305) and leads to “the motion and vibration of our whole being” (Cassirer 1944, 150). The third level concerns intersubjectivity: ‘aesthetic consciousness’ is established and with it the passage through ‘the conceptual objective’ that involves the ‘general communicability’ of aesthetic feelings and sensations. Although the subject

“remains by itself” (*in sich selbst bleibt*), it simultaneously frees itself from particularity and knows itself as “bearer of an overall feeling [*Träger eines Gesamtgefühls*]” (Cassirer 2001, 307). Feeling reaches “aesthetic universality” (Cassirer 1944, 145) and thus objectivity through the possibility of communication, i.e., through expressive language.³ While the subjectivity of expressive meaning concerns the emotions and feelings aroused by the aesthetic/mythic experience, its ‘objectivity’ is responsible for the communicability of the same experience: “aesthetic universality” means that any aesthetic predicate such as beauty “is not restricted to a special individual but extends over the whole field of judging subjects” (*ibid.*). Culture thus has a mediating function within this sphere of expressive language.

Consequently, Husserl and Cassirer disagree with regard to the sphere of passivity: For Cassirer, as stated above, the passivity of perception is already charged with intersubjective activity and meaning as well as with shared emotions, since it is the perceived object itself which is expressive. Their views also diverge on the role of the subject within the sphere of passive experience. While for Husserl, the subject is emotionally active insofar as it responds affectively to the appeal of the object, thereby endowing it with sense and meaning, for Cassirer the subject ‘reads’ the impersonal and intersubjective sense already contained in the object in order to actively re-enact or re-create it.

Regarding aesthetic experience itself, Cassirer maintains that ‘expressive perception’ has its specific form which cannot be described by categories valid for other regions of being. Forms and movements such as ‘violent,’ ‘hurried,’ ‘restrained’ are experienced (*erlebt*) as ‘conditions of life’ before they ‘are judged by the understanding.’ The “experience of impression” is pre-predicative, it is thus prior to its expression by representational language, i.e., prior to objectivation (Cassirer 1957b, 80). The “certainty” and the “truth” of this “purely expressive function” are “premythical, prelogical and pre-aesthetic” (*ibid.*, 81). Hence, the experience of an expressive impression grounds the realms of symbolic forms and thereby any aesthetic experience. Cassirer describes a realm that can be seen as paralleling Husserl’s impressional experience. It is the realm of a ‘sensory experience’ which

³ Here, in his reflections on Kant’s aesthetics, he conceives of both speech and myth as an intensification of reality, such that they both belong to the sphere of expressive meaning. In *An Essay on Man*, however, speech is contrasted with myth insofar as it is understood as an extensification of reality and as concerning the sphere of representation (cf. Lauschke 2007, 205 fn. 92).

is ‘always the vehicle of a meaning’ and stands in its ‘service.’ Precisely for this reason, it is capable of performing different functions and ‘represent[ing] very different worlds of meaning,’ as the example of the line, as discussed above, clearly shows. What the movement of the line expresses is “the rhythm of an inner mood,” “an inner mobility,” a dynamic, in short, “a psychic life and being” (ibid., 200). This is not a matter of emotions or feelings motivated by the appearance, as Husserl describes, but of a form or “animated totality,” a “manifestation of life” (ibid.) intrinsically endowed with expressive meaning. This meaning discloses itself to a “pure artistic vision,” (ibid., 201) a meaning that is given within a total horizon of meaning. For Cassirer, in contrast to Husserl, the aesthetic work is never isolated, since it belongs to a “certain atmosphere” (ibid.), as already mentioned. Hence, if we consider Cassirer’s views about the ‘color of reality,’ the aesthetic work in conjunction with its surrounding atmosphere may be conceived of as the affective expression of reality. In summary, for Cassirer artworks are part of the subject’s lifeworld, they not only contribute to its shaping but open up new sense horizons. What is more, they are embedded in our everyday life, in the symbolic forms in which life is given.

6 Aesthetic Knowledge and Sensuous Surplus of Expression

At this point we can resume our previous considerations concerning the process of sensory perception in Husserl. We have seen that already at the stage of passive affections, feelings and emotions yield objectivations and value apperceptions. These are not expressed by categories, but by bodily affective responses. An affective interchange takes place between the allure exercised by objects and a specific kind of position taking on the part of the subject, which we identified as impressional, since it belongs to the sphere of hyletic passivity. Already at this early stage, the impression engendered by the hyletic experience awakens an affective sense which is prior to any categorical forming. We concluded that Husserl establishes the basis for aesthetic experience in the immediate givenness of an impressive experience. In view of this, one can hardly blame Husserl for having drawn a sharp distinction between sensuous apprehension and expressive meaning, insofar as impression itself is already animated by affective sense. Husserl’s affective sense is

not, however, equivalent to the expressive power of Cassirer's symbolic forms. For Cassirer, perception as such is not only sensuously but also categorially embedded. Therefore, what needs to be clarified is whether and how the perceived in Husserl's sense could be expressed not only by categories, but also by sensuous forms, i.e., how it might be constituted in its affective sense.

Husserl touches on the issue of the aesthetic judgment in *Ideas II* within the context of his reflections on the constitution of new objectivities. Depending on the attitude, i.e., on whether these objectivities emerge from theoretical, practical or evaluating acts, these objectivities are grasped and become subjects of predicates. In the theoretical attitude, within which we reflect immanently on the act of objectivation, we perceive or intuit beauty 'in the object.' It is important to note that for Husserl, aesthetic judgment is not a reflective judgment, i.e., a 'predicate of reflection.' It does not refer to the act itself but is a predicate of the object itself. In Husserl's (2000, 16) words: "It is in the object itself that I find the beauty." For Husserl, categories apply to the object and do not depend on our power of cognition, meaning that it is the world itself, not my spirit, which 'bears' predicates. In aesthetic judgment, the acts by which I judge something as pleasurable or enjoyable permeate every lived experience. They are the correlates of the "objective stratum superposed on the stratum of sensuous predicates," namely, the "enjoyable" – it is the object that is objectively "sad," "beautiful" or "ugly" (ibid.). In affective lived experience, these predicates are grasped in the mode of feeling as 'value objects,' such that, as we have already seen, sensuous perception is embedded with an apperception of value. The object itself expresses an aesthetic value.

The aesthetic value of beauty, for example, is not an empirical concept, but is that which we grasp through categorial intuition, which is itself in turn grounded on sensuous intuition. In the phase of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl had conceived of the fulfillment of the categorial meaning-forms according to an order of foundation. Sensuous and categorial intuitions are constitutive of objectivity, sensuous intuitions are built up of the material of perception (*Auffassungstoff*), while categorial intuition arises from the forms of perception (*Auffassungsform*) (Husserl 2001a, 276). Although categorial perception is an intuitive intentional act addressing an ideal object, it is far from being either an *a priori* condition of perception or a sensuous perception that is embedded with a non-intuitive sense in Cassirer's terms. Cassirer, as we have seen, binds both kinds of perceptions into

a unity. However, taken at its early stage in its overall sense, Cassirer's critique of Husserl's conception seems legitimate.

In order to meet Cassirer's objections, we must return to Husserl's *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*. Here Husserl departs from the assumption that categorial intuition endows the appearance with sense and claims that the origin of categories can be traced back to sensuous intuition itself. We cannot go into details here, but only remark that Husserl discloses a passive, pre-categorial process of sense formation here. Husserl (2001b, 279f.) now clearly distinguishes "between the intentionality of feeling itself, and – be it passive or, in higher levels, active – the objectivating that objectivates the contents arising in the intentionality of feeling and that makes use of them in order to constitute new predicate layers." In passive objectivation the object undergoes a process of sense formation; a sense which remains in continuous transformation alongside the continuous process of perception. The origin of the categories therefore lies already in the pre-categorial stage where an "original formation of sense" (ibid., 293) is constituted. Once this passively constituted object has been intentionally grasped through a "fully conscious positing of goals and goal oriented activity" (ibid., 288), categorial intuition fulfills the active objectivation, which itself engenders "genuine objectivities" as "firm unities of identity" (ibid.).

This means that Husserl not only has a categorial concept of the object, but also a pre-categorial 'limit concept' – as we may call it. The object is understood as a distinct unity that arises from the interweaving of hyletic data that in its turn is engendered by the concomitant passive and affective attention of the feeling subject who responds to the hyletic appeal. The categories are thus not the product of an understanding that retroactively reflects on the empirical object. They are actually originally grounded on a passive synthesis as a substrate of particularities that establish the motivational basis for the generation of the concept. Hence, categories are grounded on a pre-categorial sensuous perception. But sensuous and categorial intuitions do not always coincide: A 'surplus of meaning remains' insofar as only those determinations capable of being united in the concept of the object can actually be perceived. Husserl (2001a, 273) explains this using the example of the concept "white:" the meaning of this concept is far richer than the particular white gradation that is actually perceived. This means that the meaning intention cannot be fully accomplished by intuition, which only offers a rough or inadequately evident object.

This surplus of categorial meaning is by no means the only surplus engendered by the process of sensuous perception. Husserl did not infer its counterpart, i.e., an intuitive surplus. To disclose this, we need to return to the pre-categorial level. At this stage, the perception of the relationships of continuity, affinity and contrast in which the interweaving hyletic data stand gives rise to a sequence of continuous sense enrichment. This process endows the ‘object’ with a sensuous surplus insofar as the hyletic unity continuously increases its intuitive content, however it is conceptually grasped as a fixed and contextually detached unity. In the example above, a white rose may offer different shades of ‘white’ depending on the light, the form and disposition of its petals, etc. Here the intuition is far richer and more nuanced than the meaning intention. This means a continuous process of sensuous sense formation takes place such that the ‘object’ exhibits a pre-categorial sensuous surplus of sense that cannot be exhausted by categorial intuition. As a result, there remains a continuously deferred difference between sensuousness and categoriality, which calls into question the “parallelism between meaning reference and fulfilling intuition” (ibid., 272) that Husserl had maintained in the *Logical Investigations*.

In my view, it is precisely this pre-categorial sensuous surplus of sense that motivates an aesthetic lived experience, which expresses itself in existential feelings and emotional attunements. Hence, aesthetic lived experience originates in the emotional stirring of original sensuousness, i.e., in fundamental affectivity in Husserl’s sense. The aestheticization of this surplus of sensuousness over conceptuality engenders, as I would like to propose, a specific doxic aesthetic knowledge (cf. Breuer 2015, 241ff.) that can be expressed by affective lived experiences. In this connection, Husserl (2005, 459) himself maintains that “the consciousness of the object, the presenting consciousness, is doxic (belief-)consciousness.” We live in aesthetic consciousness, we believe in the existence of the world and its objects; we do not question the existence of what directly appears in an image. We have a doxic knowledge of the world insofar as it is apprehended in images. At this point we find the proof of the thesis put forward at the beginning of this paper. Once we have grasped this affective lived experience as a unitary sensuous-affective phenomenon of expression, i.e., as an aesthetic lived experience with its origin in the emotional stirrings of original sensuousness, we have found the arguments needed to meet Cassirer’s critique. Husserl has thus not overlooked the living efficacy of

living experience; on the contrary, he describes an event of awakening through which our emotions and feelings come to life.

7 Conclusion

The preceding considerations allow us to conclude that the object given as the noematic side of the passive intentional relationship expresses a meaning which is not conceptual, but sensuous in the sense Cassirer describes: Perception grasps the world in determinations that intrinsically belong to the phenomenon of the world itself. Since at the pre-categorical level these sensuous determinations exceed conceptuality, we can conclude that it is the sensuous object itself that unfolds this excess of meaning. This object is given as an objective unity of expression, a totality of meaning that affects our senses and triggers a lived experience of expression. But aesthetic experience is “incomparably richer,” as Cassirer (1944, 145) remarks in *An Essay on Man*. At this point we can recall that for Cassirer aesthetic experience “is pregnant with infinite possibilities which remain unrealized in ordinary sense experience” insofar as it reveals the “inexhaustibility of the aspects of things” (ibid.). These infinite possibilities are expressed by a surplus of sensuousness that stimulates the subject’s affective response. In short, the (re-)invention of the world takes place in a living experience of aesthetic expression that at first overwhelms and befalls the subjects who can only retroactively find adequate words for their existential feelings and emotions. In perception, we are impressively conscious of this objective impression which awakens aesthetic feelings in us. This means that both the experience of expression in Cassirer’s work and of impressive feelings in Husserl’s are grounded on a deeper underlying level, on the pre-categorical level, where this sensuous excess builds up. This is the level on which any symbolic form of art can be grounded. It is this excess of sensuous meaning which endows the object with a pre-predicative sense. From this it follows that appearance in Husserl’s sense not only bears the character of aesthetical feeling which stems from the subject but is itself meaningful. We can thus conclude that appearance is a unitary phenomenon of expression in itself and for us.

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Symbolic Pregnancy and the Theory of Abstraction in the Philosophy of Husserl and Cassirer

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Abstract: The article compares the concept of *symbolic pregnancy* with Husserl's phenomenology in order to see whether Cassirer's account can be compatible with phenomenological thought. It is argued that it is not, because Cassirer's theory of formation of concepts cannot accept the role that Husserl gives to intuition in his theory of abstraction. As it is built on the position in *Substance and Function* that refuses every possibility of givenness, *symbolic pregnancy* cannot be thought of as a concept compatible with phenomenology. Therefore, Cassirer refers to Husserl's account only as a psychological descriptive theory of abstraction that does not need to use the concept of substance, but he criticizes the distinction between matter and form as a sensualistic heritage.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, Ernst Cassirer, Phenomenology, Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Abstraction

The following contribution aims to defend the philosophical position that Cassirer's concept of symbolic pregnancy derives from the theory of abstraction he elaborates in *Substance and Function*, and the differences between his views on this topic and those offered by Husserl can be traced to the distance that separates their accounts of a philosophy of culture.

Critique intent on understanding the possible compatibility between phenomenology and neo-Kantianism often concentrates on the later work of Husserl and Cassirer. I refer here to the studies of Ernst Wolfgang Orth (1989; 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2009), the first to interpret these two philosophies as philosophies of culture. From

this perspective, the very essence of Husserl's phenomenological path is condensed within *Crisis of the European Sciences*, an indication that his intentional structure of consciousness is similar to the relationship of signification. The same structure is recognised by Orth as the basis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, in which the connection between the single experience and the structures of information and understanding of the 'world' provides for the possibility of constructing a human world that is always cultural. This point of debate was recently recalled in an exchange between Sebastian Luft (2004) and Nicholas de Warren (2015a; 2015b) that, to its credit, has renewed perspectives on this line of study.

Other scholars, following Orth, have directed their research toward the points of proximity between the two theories of signification, although from an epistemological perspective (see Bermes 1997; 1998; Plümacher 2003). The distinction between *Zeichen* and *Anzeichen* in the first *Logical Investigation* suggests traces of the concept of symbolic form, insofar as *Anzeichen* corresponds to the act of determining the object. Thus, the articulation of the determination of experience and, in particular, of the mythical form of understanding the world, which Cassirer presents in *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, is drawn from the intentional structure of consciousness.

An interesting direction of study, from a gnoseological perspective, has been introduced by Christian Möckel (1992; 2001). He emphasises the conceptual over the thematic level, and introduces a more specific comparison of the pivotal concepts inherent in the two lines of thought. Research he completed in 1992 argues that Cassirer adopts the structure of intentionality as a model to mould his concept of representation and symbolic pregnance, although, in line with the Marburg school's classical interpretation, he rejects the role of intuition. Cassirer also considers Husserl's position on abstraction in order to elaborate *Substance and Function*, as it offers him a paradigm for a 'non-substantialised' theory of knowledge that allows for the possible emancipation of human creative thinking (Möckel 2001, 250). Michael Bösch (2002) further expands this line of thought with its claim that passivity in genetic phenomenology can also be seen as a commonality with the philosophy of symbolic forms, especially regarding the position on the expressive function that characterises the immediate relationship between the spirit and its object in mythical thought.

I intend to place my research along this track and examine the origins of these two lines of thinking to understand whether symbolic pregnance can be seen as a

phenomenological concept. I will argue that Cassirer's concept of abstraction, in contrast to Husserl's, rejects all proof of an intuitive presentation to consciousness. But, if symbolic pregnancy is built on the theory of abstraction in *Substance and Function*, and if this theory is incompatible with Husserl's account, the meaning of the critique of Husserl's account in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* becomes clear and, at the very least, we can doubt a simple compatibility between phenomenology and the philosophy of symbolic forms, although both authors understand the cultural world as significative and meaningful.

1 Critique of the Aristotelian Theory of Abstraction

Cassirer uses his characteristic method of approach, historical reconstruction, to explain the theory of abstraction in *Substance and Function*, which is to say, he develops his theoretical position through an examination of the ideas of other philosophers.

Accordingly, he begins with a critique of a statement made by Aristotle. For Cassirer, the appearance of the mathematical theory of the manifold signals a crisis for the classical theory of knowledge based on the identification between the universal as a substance (*res*) and the general concept. For Cassirer, the central point is that the Aristotelian interpretation of the formation of concepts implies a gap between knowledge and its object owing to the opposition between genus and species, and further, this fracture originates with a *metaphysical* interpretation of the genus. Cassirer agrees with the interpretation of Aristotelian logic as a counterpart to metaphysics: Aristotle's description of the distinction between genus and species borrows its structure from the tension between substance as individuum (in other words, as *synolon*) and substance as form.

Aristotle would read substance first of all as individuum, thus rejecting the relationship between the idea and the thing posed by Plato, who saw the idea as an unempirical paradigm of the comprehension of experience. On the contrary, Aristotle sets genus and species at two ontologically consistent poles. Thus, the difference between genus and species becomes, in the end, the consequence of a rigid binary founded on a metaphysical basis. The real difficulty of this position is evident: the knowledge of being is shaped on the articulation of being itself, hence,

abstraction consists in an isolation of some similar aspects of a plurality of things that, from other perspectives, are utterly dissimilar. Therefore, the result is seen as a pure reality, as a *substance of a second degree*.

The consequence of this position is that knowledge of reality consists in a gno-seological hierarchy that reflects an ontological hierarchy, comprised of genus and species. To be more precise, genus is traditionally defined by the common *features* of a group of single things. From this viewpoint, the *general concept* presupposes nothing but the existence of a multiplicity of things and the power of the mind to choose which feature is the criterion for grouping them together. This does not, however, guarantee any validity to the concept: although we may group some objects together under a common feature, we will not truly constitute any homogeneous manifold; rather, we may collect only a group of things that does not correspond to any scientific concept: "If we group cherries and meat together under the attributes red, juicy and edible, we do not thereby attain a valid logical concept but a meaningless combination of words, quite useless for the comprehension of the particular cases." (Cassirer 1923, 7) Cassirer insists on the primacy of metaphysics over logic as the reason for the failure of scientific thought prior to modern philosophy's re-discovery of Plato. His interpretation of the history of modern philosophy, in fact, involves a search for the Platonic seed at the root of the development of Western thought and allows for the possibility of imagining reality as being, in Galileo's words, 'written in a mathematical language.' As we know, it was necessary to change the basis of *physics* to improve a scientific comprehension of reality: Aristotle considered physics to be engaged in research on essences, whereas modern philosophy considers only phenomena, and further, not the phenomena themselves, but their mathematical determinations. Thus, in the modern vision of science, relationships, which are mathematically defined, are more important than essences and can also be seen as the only content of a scientific comprehension of reality. This points to one of the widest gaps between the Aristotelian tradition and the idealistic attitude in the study of reality. In the first case,

[...] the fundamental categorical relationship of the thing to its properties remains henceforth the guiding point of view; while relationship determinations are only considered in so far as they can be transformed, by some sort of mediation, into properties of a subject or a plurality of subjects. (Ibid., 8)

The effects of Aristotle's outlook on logical and gnoseological theory are clear. Genus and species are crossed by a tension between the extension and content of the concept; that is, the broader the comprehension of a concept, the narrower its determination. From a 'classical' perspective, then, conceptualisation and universalisation imply the loss of some 'properties' of things.

The conceptual pyramid, which we form in this way, reaches its summit in the abstract representation of "something" under the all-inclusive being of which every possible intellectual concept falls, but which at the same time is totally devoid of specific meaning. (Ibid., 6)

So, conceptualisation becomes a process that leads us away from knowledge rather than toward a more universal understanding, contradicting the very aim of knowledge itself. Every authentic scientific concept aspires to expand its reach without losing any content. The act of negating empirical aspects must become a *positive* action: in order to reach a universal understanding, each particular case, each particular element of the manifold defined by the concept must be accounted for rather than eliminated.

In Cassirer's view, the overall difficulty is due to the concept of substance:

The determination of the concept according to its next higher genus and its specific difference reproduces the process by which the real substance successively unfolds itself in its special forms of being. Thus it is this basic conception of *substance* to which the purely logical theories of Aristotle constantly have reference. (Ibid., 7)

Accordingly, in a classical interpretation of a concept, the existence of the variety of substances grouped under the same species is always presupposed. Relations between elements remain at a distance: they are considered only insofar as they are grounded in existing substances that serve to mediate between them, though without any inherent validity. Consequently, Cassirer is compelled to underline "the different value which is placed upon *thing-concepts* and *relation-concepts*" (ibid., 9).

The centrality of the notion of substance forced not only Aristotle, but the whole of philosophical tradition, to confront the coupled singular-universal as a couple

of ‘things.’ As mentioned, the Aristotelian vision of science is based on the notion of essence: the study of what nature is, reduced to the essences of several of its elements. The aim of this science is therefore nothing but *form* and the organisation of the classification of forms found in nature, and we know the concept of *form* to be pivotal within the theory of being as substance.

Even the tradition of Empiricism cannot escape this heritage; the rejection of all value on the conceptual level as one ontological consistent does not lead to a renovation of the theory of the formation of concepts. By refusing to bestow value on the universal, Empiricism achieves nothing but scepticism: it replaces an ontological vision, according to which every feature binding a multiplicity in a conceptually organised manifold is something real, with an alternative vision that takes purely psychological common elements into account.

While formerly “the traditional schema” had been outer things that were compared and out of which a common element was selected, here the same process is merely transferred to *presentations* as psychological correlates of things. [...] To the “substantial forms,” which, according to Aristotle, represent the final goal of this comparing activity, there correspond certain fundamental elements, which run through the whole field of perception. (Ibid., 9f.)

Furthermore, Cassirer criticises psychologism to the extent it is based on a sensualistic vision of the concept, as a result of which mathematical concepts derive from the practical capacity of enumerating. If we accept this to be true, it is impossible to grasp how complex systems of calculation that exceed this practical capacity, such as infinite numerical series, are possible. Every psychological interpretation of mathematical thought employs a constructive logical concept, even though it does not admit to this. Consequently, a rigorous empirical standpoint is untenable, as that which it attempts to demonstrate – the foundation of mathematics in experience – presupposes conditions of validity necessary to pose experience as the foundation of mathematical concepts.

The demand for a generalisation of primitive experiences of numbers contains, although concealed, that very function of the universality of number concepts, which was to have been set aside by the explanation. [...] the same

intellectual procedure, which is indispensable to every theory in proceeding to the higher arithmetical forms, constitutes the necessary and adequate foundation for the determination of the elements themselves. (Ibid., 31)

Now, Cassirer poses the question: How can we think of the opposition between universality and singularity at a distance from a metaphysical framework?

2 Cassirer's Theory of Formation of Concepts

In Cassirer's account, science never uses an Aristotelian form of conceptualisation because it does not share its aim to include the totality of particular cases under the same definition. Accordingly, we cannot apply the scheme of selecting one type of feature in order to construct the manifold; rather, we must *construct* the rule that will connect a plurality of singularities in a group. This is the structure of *mathematical concepts*.

Mathematical concepts, which arise through genetic definition, through the intellectual establishment of a *constructive* connection, are different from empirical concepts, which are merely to be copies of certain factual characteristics of the given reality of things. (Cassirer 1923, 12)

The distinction between empirical and mathematical concepts is that the former always require the existence of things with some common properties underlined by the operation of abstraction, while the latter do not require the plurality of existing things *before* the 'choice' of a principle that drives comprehension through this plurality in order to give it a unity. The rule of connection is presupposed to the connected elements. The concept is presented, and the manifold constructed on the basis of this *pre*-supposition. Thus, the relationship between objects comes before the objects themselves, as the function of synthesis is the starting point for an ordering of the experience in a way that coincides with knowledge. "There appears here in opposition to bare "abstraction," an act of thought itself, a free production of certain relational systems" (ibid., 12).

The comparison of contents expresses a power in the organisation of multiplicity that derives from different categorical functions. The classical and empiricist

theories of abstraction confuse this power of categorisation with a collective operation. However, this collection is not the very essence of abstraction: it simply makes us aware of this categorical synthesis from the perspective of the result, similar to a visual shift from the viewpoint of the object rather than the subject. Moreover, the connection operating under the profile of a common feature is just one of the possible linking structures that thought can create based on the multiplicity of experience. However, we can find many ways in which to organise this multiplicity. In other words,

The categorical acts, which we characterize by the concepts of the whole and its parts, and of the thing and its attributes, are not isolated but belong to a *system* of logical categories, which moreover they by no means exhaust. (Ibid., 18)

In the mathematical scheme of conceptualisation, what is valid is the *rule* of connection. We can certainly doubt the capacity of this kind of conceptualisation: Do we not lose individual cases when we claim the rule of connection of this plurality of objects? Do we retain only an empty ‘formula’ that expresses the sole *form*, without any concrete reality? For Cassirer, this does not correspond with the logical structure of the mathematical concept, that is, with the structure of a *series*.

The structure of the mathematical series guarantees the possibility of every concretisation of the universal rule. When we have the rule that constructs the entire series, it is possible to determine the single case that derives from the rule. As Cassirer observes, “we don’t isolate any abstract part whatever from the manifold before us, but we create for its members a definite relationship by thinking of them as bound together by an inclusive law” (ibid., 20).

However, this structure of the synthetic organisation of data is not drawn from the variety of things: it is a functional power of the constitution of a multiplicity ordered by a law. Thus, the concept is not yet general, that is, a concept obtained by a collection of relevant characteristics: it is a *concept of function* (*Funktionsbegriff*), a concept that corresponds to the rule of construction of a certain manifold. Here we see the pivot of Cassirer’s entire argument: the opposition between *Substanzbegriff* and *Funktionsbegriff* is a conflict between an Aristotelian, metaphysical method and a mathematical, non-metaphysical method of conceptualisation. The

Substanzbegriff, the substance-concept, is the basis of every form of comprehension of nature and reality that considers a hierarchic vision of being. This outlook presupposes a metaphysical predominance of the concept of substance and an articulation of the whole being by means of a gradual process, although it is a legacy of the prevalence of the concept of substance over the concept of relation. If we alter the point of view, if we begin from the construction of relations instead of the collection of similarities, we see that the functional concept reveals an enormous potentiality:

[...] the field of application of this form of logic is not confined to mathematics alone. On the contrary, it extends over into the field of *knowledge of nature*; for the concept of function constitutes the general schema and model according to which the modern concept of nature has been moulded in its progressive historical development. (Ibid., 21)

This direct correlation between the series' rule of construction, that is, the *function* that defines it, and each single case that can be drawn from it, is a kind of osmosis that bypasses the gap between the *member of the series* and the *form of the series*. The content of a functional concept does not dissolve into the elements, because it is the law of their connection and construction. This concept also solves the dilemma of the prevalence of the notion of substance, as the function cannot be conceived as an independent *thing* among particular things: "its 'being' consists exclusively in the logical determination" (ibid., 26).

3 Husserl's Quotation in *Substance and Function*

In this section of *Substance and Function*, Cassirer chooses to quote the theory of abstraction developed by Husserl in *Logical Investigations*. As stated earlier, Cassirer typically recalls the theories of other philosophers to consolidate his own theoretical position. This is certainly the case with Husserl, whom he considered an authority, not only because he was well known to Cassirer himself, but also because he was an interlocutor of Paul Natorp (see Cassirer 1923, 24ff.).

Cassirer emphasises the necessity for a new psychological foundation for this new theory of the formation of concepts:

If the *objects* with which pure logic deals are not identical with the individual contents of perception, but possess their own structure and “essence,” then the question must arise as to how this peculiar “essence” comes to our consciousness and by what acts it is grasped. (Ibid., 24)

Thus, in addition to a new *logical* theory for the formation of a concept, a psychological theory of how it is ‘grasped’ is necessary, which need not have recourse to any kind of substance. This, for Cassirer, is the case with Husserl’s theory of abstraction.

A detailed presentation of Husserl’s theory is unnecessary for the scope of this discussion; rather, for the purposes of this text, it is sufficient to recall selected aspects useful in our comparison. First, we must distinguish between ideation and formalisation: the latter kind of abstraction reaches the pure form, the level discussed in the third *Logical Investigation*. We will focus here on the former, ideation, as Cassirer does in *Substance and Function*.

For Husserl, the ability to intuitively grasp the concept in the empirical representation is presupposed by every possibility of knowledge (Husserl 2001, 67ff.), as he states in § 29 of the *Prolegomena*. At this point, Husserl distinguishes the *generelles Allgemeine*, generality, from the *universelles Allgemeine*, universality, in order to recognise two different levels: the *ideal* and the *factual*. In this way, he maintains a distinction between the extension of universal concepts, which covers only factual singularities, and the extension of general concepts, which groups together *ideal* singularities that Husserl does not hesitate to call *species* (ibid., 109). So, by means of ideative (*ideierende*) abstraction, we can grasp the ideal unity of the species, which has its own validity with respect to the manifold of factual individualities.

What type of relation does abstraction create between individualities and species?

Abstraction is the act of consciousness that refers to the generality, the species, by seeing the concrete singularity. For this reason, a repetition of acts of ideation always gives us the same ideal unity *through* a manifold of individua: we always recognise the same colour in a multiplicity of perceptions of the same chromatic nuance.

The *Second Logical Investigation*, which presents this idea with greater clarity, aims to answer a question raised by Husserl in the *Prolegomena* and in the *First Investigation*. While Husserl presents the validity of the ideal level from a

gnoseological point of view, which corresponds to the validity of meaning, neither the *Prolegomena* nor the *First Investigation* explains fully *how* to reach this ideal level. Husserl's response makes use of a theory he presents explicitly in the *Fifth Investigation*: the theory of the acts of consciousness.

In the *Introduction* to the *Second Investigation*, Husserl links meaningful expression respectively with species and the intuitive object through which the species is given. As we grasp the ideal unity of meaning with respect to the act-character of signification, so we grasp the ideal species with respect to its analogue through which we refer to that species.

It is important to note that Husserl revisited the notion of *species* during subsequent years. In 1902 he admitted that his notion of species was weak and problematic as it did not consider the multiplicity of the forms of consciousness by means of which generality is gained; moreover, he went on to reject the notion of the idea as the *result* of *abstraction*. Six years later, in 1908, and as a result of the lessons on the *Bedeutungslehre*, Husserl began to define essence as an ideal, universal, autonomous object, and from 1918 on, he completely abandoned the concept of species to escape the confusion between 'essence,' 'meaning' and 'species.' In this way, Husserl clarified the precedence of *eidos* over ideation (cf. Lavigne 2005, 204, 281f.). Nevertheless, we could argue that what Husserl calls *eidos* has its roots in the notion of species.

In these writings, Husserl constructs his theory of abstraction on the correlation between the phenomenological and the ontological levels. In fact, the distinction between different kinds of acts, that is, between acts directed toward the individuum and those directed toward the species, is a distinction of a phenomenological order. Thus, Husserl's critique of the Empiricist account of abstraction is generated by Empiricism's inability to grasp the radical difference between species and individuum: if we say that *general ideas* are traces of impressions, the ideal level collapses onto the psychological level.

Ideative abstraction is thus a specific act of consciousness that refers to the species and not the individuum. This 'referring' is not, as we know, the result of a process of reasoning, but is an *insight* directed toward the species as its object. In other words, the act of ideation is a particular act of intuition.

We could now ask why Cassirer assumes Husserl's phenomenology as a point of comparison in *Substance and Function* if some relevant differences remain. Husserl's theory is valuable because its research rejects any metaphysical presupposition, and

focuses only on the explanation of how to reach the concept. On the other hand, Husserl critiques the Empiricist theory of abstraction as empirical process in his *Prolegomena* and states the absolute validity of pure logic independent from any empirical condition. Cassirer sees in this assertion valuable support for his deconstruction of the classical theory of abstraction and, at the same time, a psychological, non-empiricist way in which to describe the *process* of the construction of the concept. Thus, phenomenology provides Cassirer's theory with the basis, from the perspective of descriptive psychology, for a credible vision of his line of thought.

It is important to note that Cassirer would have read the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*. When Husserl published his logical work for the first time, he assigned phenomenology the meaning of a descriptive psychology (cf. Plümacher 2004, 293). It is not possible to overlap Empiricism with psychology in general, Husserl argued, as it is simply the method of reconstructing relational causes-effects used by a certain kind of psychology. He thus intended to distinguish his *descriptive* psychology from a *genetic (causal)* psychology. Husserl himself, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, refers to *Logical Investigations* as a work marked by psychologism, which is to say, he considers this text as still in the natural attitude (Lavigne 2005, 76). If we consider this aspect, Cassirer's reading follows Husserl's own aims.

On the other hand, Cassirer, as a pupil of Cohen and Natorp, rejects the gnosological core of Husserl's account; he cannot accept the relevance of intuition with respect to knowledge in Husserl's theory. As Holzhey (2010, 26) states, "in intuition [...] the *meant* is brought to *givenness*. That intuition which 'fulfils' a meaning intention (significative intention) leads directly, or more directly, to the thing itself and thereby to 'cognition.'" In other words, intuition is presentation, an immediate means of accessing the object that requires no mediation. The importance of intuition for every cognition is evident in the "principle of all principles," as we read in *Ideas I* (Husserl 1983, 44).¹

What Cassirer cannot admit in his theory of knowledge is the rejection of the notion that cognition requires mediation. The primacy of relations over things

¹ The importance of intuition appears also in relation to the role of individuum for logic and knowledge in general, as we read in paragraph 16 of *Ideas I*: "the individuum is the primal object required by pure logic, the absolute of logic back to which all logic variants refer" (Husserl 1983, 29f.). It is true that, for Husserl, not every intuition provides an individuum, but every individuum, as the object of consciousness, requires intuition as "*adequate self-presentation of the object of cognition*" itself (ibid., 30).

must indicate the origin of cognition in the operation of relating terms, instead of immediately ‘receiving’ a manifestation of anything. Cassirer distinguishes the psychological from the logical starting point by attributing intuitive presentation to the former.

It is true that, in the psychological sense, we can only present the meaning of a certain relation to ourselves in connection with some given terms, that serve as its “foundations.” But these terms, which we owe to sensuous intuition, have no absolute, but rather a changeable existence. We take them only as hypothetical starting-points; but we look for all closer determination from their successive insertion into various relational complexes. It is by this intellectual process that the provisional content first becomes a fixed logical object. The law of connection, therefore, signifies the real πρότερον τῇ φύσει, while the elements in their apparent absoluteness signify only a πρότερον πρὸς ἡμᾶς. Intuition seems to grasp the content as on isolated self-contained existence; but as soon as we go on to characterize this existence in judgement, it resolves into a web of related structures which reciprocally support each other. Concept and judgement know the individual only as a member, as a point in a systematic manifold; here as in arithmetic, the manifold as opposed to all particular structures, appears as a logic *prius*. (Cassirer 1923, 94)

This is the reason for Cassirer’s use of quotations marks when he refers to the theory of abstraction by underlining its orientation toward essences: ultimately, he cannot accept the idea of an essence as an object of description; that is, he cannot admit to a theory that gives validity to essences as directly grasped objects. We can say then that Cassirer accepts the descriptive level of Husserl’s phenomenology of abstraction only on a psychological level, but refuses its logical and gnoseological validity.

4 The Origin of Symbolic Pregnancy in *Substance and Function*

Cassirer affirms the connection between *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and *Substance and Function* in the opening of the first volume of his masterpiece:

I first projected this work, whose first volume I am here submitting, at the time of the investigations summed up in my book *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (Berlin, 1910). These investigations dealt essentially with the structure of mathematical and scientific thought. When I attempted to apply my findings to the problems of the cultural sciences, it gradually became clear to me that general epistemology, with its traditional form and limitations, does not provide an adequate methodological basis for the cultural sciences. (Cassirer 1980, 69)

With these words, Cassirer links his study to the results of the research collected in *Substance and Function* and declares that this new field of inquiry is simply an extension of the research he pursued at the beginning of his philosophical career. This new direction of study aims to examine the general presuppositions of knowledge itself so that it can include all forms of understanding that have appeared during the historical development of the human spirit in order to grasp the common productive foundation. In other words, Cassirer wishes to shed light on pure subjectivity as the subjective foundation of the determined objects of experience.

However, this more comprehensive project maintains two aspects of the theory of the formation of concepts, as we read in *Substance and Function*.

First, there is the role of mediation. A symbol as the synthetic structure of mediation takes its shape from the concept of function described in Cassirer's logical work: as the concept is conceived as a function of the synthesis of a manifold under the same serial rule, so the symbol acts as a synthetic medium that can give form to experience, a form that has its own rule, even if it is not always a strictly logical rule of connection.

Second, symbolic structure provides for the possibility of a direct connection between the single experience, the single object to which experience is directed, and the universal structure of synthesis.

The constructive, creative aspect of the synthesis operated by conceptualisation, as we have seen in *Substance and Function*, is an aspect that is read explicitly as a creative function of the human spirit in terms of formation in the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.

What science designates as its "being" and its "object," ceases to appear as a simple and indivisible set of facts; every new type or trend of thought

discloses some new phase in this complex. [...] As this insight develops and gains acceptance in science itself, the naïve *copy theory* of knowledge is discredited. The fundamental concepts of each science, the instruments with which it propounds its questions and formulates its solutions, are regarded no longer as passive images of something given but as *symbols* created by the intellect itself. (Ibid., 74f.)

There is a danger hidden in this perspective; if we focus only on the manifold of the manifestations of the human spirit, we may become lost in the plurality of the concretisations of cultural formation: cultural sciences become, to some extent, a classification of phenomena without the underpinning or support of logical structure. On the contrary, if we reduce every cultural element to a unique, universal, logical form, we run the risk they become fleeting, only *moments* in a universal process. The solution Cassirer proposes involves using the symbol as a “medium through which all the configurations effected in the separate branches of cultural life must pass, but which nevertheless retains its particular nature, its specific character” (ibid., 84).

This synthetic function of a symbol works in much the same way as the mathematical structure of conceptualisation. According to Cassirer, if we compare the relation between the single element of experience and the universal form in which it is inscribed – what is referred to, in other texts, as its *meaning* – with the relation between mathematical concepts and every case of the series described by the formula, we can see they share a common structure, although they do not use the same rigorous method.²

Yet, if we look at the way in which the symbol connects singularity to universality, we understand there is a subtle interpenetration. At the beginning of the third part of the *Introduction* to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic*

² In the *Essay on Man*, Cassirer summarises the mathematical scheme of conceptualisation: “We cannot speak of single or isolated numbers. The essence of number is always relative, not absolute. A single number is only a single place in a general systematic order. It has no being of its own, no self-contained reality. Its meaning is defined by the position it occupies in the whole numerical system. The series of the natural numbers is an infinite series. But this infinity sets no limits to our theoretical knowledge. [...] All the terms are bound together by a common bond. They originate in one and the same generative relation, that relation which connects a number n with its immediate successor ($n+1$)” (Cassirer 1944, 267).

Forms, Cassirer asks how a 'finite and particular sensory content' can be charged with a general spiritual meaning. In response, he maintains that in order to characterise a specific form of relation in its concrete use and meaning, we must do more than describe its qualitative nature; we must insert it within the complex system in which it has its place. From such a perspective, placing singularity within universality means setting it in the right position described by a serial structure constructed by the form-giving function. Here, similarity with the structure of the functional concept described in *Substance and Function* is clear, as Cassirer observes in the following passage:

It lies in the very nature of consciousness that it cannot posit any content without, by this simple act, posing a complex of other contents. [...] If with dogmatic metaphysics we take the concept of absolute *being* as our starting point, this question must seem ultimately insoluble. (Cassirer 1980, 97)

For Cassirer, the representation of one content in and through another is the condition of a vision of consciousness as unity. He maintains, therefore, the pre-eminence of totality over the single element on which knowledge focuses.

Cassirer must recognise a 'natural symbolism' as an inner frame that, by means of the projection of a singular element of the experience on the total unity of consciousness, makes possible the act of representation, which, like a single stone in an intricate mosaic, gives meaning to every part and every level of our world of experience. In Cassirer's view of the relation between singularity and universality, every fragment of our 'having a meaningful world' can make sense only when it is a part of the whole, an element of the unity of consciousness, and in this way, it takes its place in the formal series of the organised, meaningful totality created continually by the human spirit.

Thus, Cassirer's description of this structural relation between the single element and the manifold of other contents of consciousness, this somewhat direct movement made possible by the significative structure of experience, still employs the same terms of logical reflection on the synthetic function of the mathematical concept. The overcoming of the metaphysical position, which requires the use of the concept of substance, is the key to the new perspective on how consciousness is directed toward that complex of meaningful experiences that is its world, as the sole condition for a meaningful experience is its collocation in an ordered

symbolic manifold. The whole of consciousness precedes its parts and gives them their right places in the unified whole, as the law of a series defines and collocates every single case that falls under it. This is what Cassirer calls the ‘basic function of signification.’

Therefore, a central part of the analysis of the mathematical formation of concepts, as Cassirer relates in *Substance and Function*, that is, the primacy of relations over things, here assumes a broader meaning and a structural role in building the entire human consciousness:

Since every particular content of consciousness is situated in a network of diverse relations, by virtue of which its simple existence and self-representation contain *reference* to other and still other contents, there can and must be certain formations of consciousness in which the pure form of reference is, as it were, sensuously embodied. (Ibid., 106)

This is how Cassirer describes the function of linguistic form, but it is the way every fragment is connected to the whole of consciousness. The ‘power of representation’ is grounded in natural symbolism, but it also reveals the ‘presence’ of the general meaning in a singular, perceptual element. As Cassirer explains, “A present content possesses the power of evoking another content, which was not immediately given but merely conveyed by it” (ibid.). Furthermore, the link to the research on scientific construction of the system of signs is explicitly recalled by Cassirer in the pages that follow, in which he retraces and summarises the path of the history of science unravelled in *Substance and Function*, beginning with the analysis of the mathematical structure of conceptualisation (ibid., 107f.).

If we compare this text with the fifth chapter of the last volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, it is clear that Cassirer’s outline of the concept of symbolic pregnancy maintains the same structure as that seen in the relation between a singular element and consciousness as a meaningful whole.

On the one hand, Cassirer reproduces the same proportions between singular content and universal meaning that have already been discussed in the first volume. On the other hand, he himself applies this determination of symbolic pregnancy to the texts of the *Introduction*: he refers, in fact, to the scheme of linguistic form at the beginning of the chapter in order to clarify the process of how symbolic pregnancy works.

According to Cassirer, the structural link between a singular part and the complex of experience is always valid in meaningful experience. To further elucidate this point, he uses the example of the structure of language, for which

[...] each particular phenomenon is now no more than a letter which is not apprehended for its own sake [...]; rather, our vision passes through the letter and beyond it to ascertain the signification of the word to which the letter belongs and the meaning of the sentence in which this word stands (Cassirer 1957, 191).

Nonetheless, Cassirer still turns to the mathematical model of conceptualisation as a blueprint to understand symbolic pregnance:

This integration, this apprehension of the totality of experience starting from a single factor, is only made possible by definite laws which govern the transition from one another. The single factor of momentary perception must – to preserve the mathematical metaphor – be apprehended as one which stands in a universal functional equation and can be determined on the strength of it. This determination itself is no mere accumulation and additive combination of particular values but it is attainable solely through the order that they assume within certain basic categorical forms. (Ibid., 203)

Finally, we can claim that the structure of symbolic pregnance has its roots in *Substance and Function* and always assumes the mathematical understanding of conceptualisation as a scheme of composition for every form of symbolic function.

Our excursus through the *Introduction* to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has shown that *before* the redaction of the chapter on symbolic pregnance in the third volume of Cassirer's masterpiece, the structure of the direct interpenetration between singularity and universality, or between the single content of consciousness and its meaning, is already present. Thus, we can assume that at the time of writing, Cassirer's ideas on symbolic pregnance were already well established in his mind; his vision maintains a strong continuity with his first works on logic and the philosophy of science.

Consequently, the concept of symbolic form lies in the theory of conceptualisation he elaborated in 1910, and we can agree with the view of Preti (1999, xii) that

a comparison between Husserl and Cassirer must seriously consider their theories of abstraction.

5 Conclusions: Why Does Cassirer Criticise Husserl in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*?

The last stone to be placed into the mosaic of this discussion is the critique of Husserl's position on the relation between *hyle* and *morphé* within intentional consciousness.

Cassirer sees in Husserl's phenomenology the influence of a sensationalistic heritage. He recalls the 'fundamental fallacy of sensationalism,' outlined by Kant, to allow for doubt regarding the attribution to the senses of a power to compose synthetic images of objects rather than to provide sole impressions. Although Kant corrected this fallacy, recognising the roles played by spontaneity and receptivity in the construction of knowledge as a result of the distinction between understanding and sensation, his solution, in Cassirer's view, remained ambiguous. Kant did not free his vision from the old psychology that regarded the faculty of sensation as the source of the matter for knowledge. Receptivity and spontaneity are conceived by Kant in such a way that the question of a sensationalistic deformation within transcendental philosophy has its justification: he replicated the model of the division of the human power of objectivation in terms of faculties typically adopted during the 18th century.

Thus, while Kant is credited with attempting a subjective foundation of the entire building of knowledge, he remains ensnared by the metaphysical distinctions among the different faculties and cannot elaborate on a continual theory of knowledge. If sensation provides the sensual data to understanding, and shapes them in form, there is no place for a unity of knowledge that has only an inner differentiation of degrees.

The true meaning of Kant's position lies beneath the surface. Sensation and understanding do not exist as psychic faculties. Thus, it is impossible to speak of a raw material sensation animated by understanding, a 'necromancer' that awakens it to the life of consciousness. If 'nothing becomes something' for consciousness, that is, if something meaningless can be guided to a level of meaningfulness, even though at the beginning matter is entirely opposite to form, Kant's transcendental

position has no advantage over the sensationalist theory of knowledge. Yet, insofar as the transcendental perspective deals with the conditions of the possibility for experience that must necessarily be a *formed* experience, the question regarding what matter comes *before* any formation by the consciousness has no place. Matter and form are simple correlative terms of a unity of consciousness that consists in a graduality. In fact, the distinction between material elements within consciousness is untenable. Experience is a totality, for no content of consciousness can be identified before and outside of any experience-totality. This is true in the measure of relations that precede and give foundation to related elements: “the analysis of consciousness can never lead back to absolute elements: it is precisely the pure relation which governs the building of consciousness and which stands out in it as a genuine *a priori*, an essentially first factor” (Cassirer 1957, 202f.).

Therefore, we can understand the critique levelled against Husserl’s distinction of matter and form, *hyle* and *morphé*, within consciousness:

If we equate the spheres of consciousness and meaning – as Husserl does with such radical sharpness – can we still, *within* consciousness, retain an absolute opposition between matter and form? [...] Husserl dissects the whole of experience into two halves: primary contents, which still contain no meaning, and experiences of factors of experience, which are grounded in a specific intentionality. (Ibid., 198)

The aim of the critique is evidently to distinguish between ‘formless matter’ and ‘matterless form’ as two independent spheres and to isolate their primary elements given to consciousness. Thus, Husserl’s error, emerging from a somewhat sensualistic heritage, is essentially the same as that of Kant’s: they both attempt to trace the problems of meaning back to an origin in which matter is given and, in this way, distinguished from form that must be understood, at this point, as a spontaneous act of consciousness. Because the significant “stratum” of experience would be the result of the active role of intentional consciousness, Husserl maintains a trace of the traditional distinction of consciousness in different orientations despite his vision of a functional unity of the spirit (cf. Orth 1996, 167ff.; 2003a, 130ff.; Bermes 1997, 178; Möckel 1998, 144–148).

If the point of divergence between the two lines of thought is located in the impossibility for Cassirer to trace the meaningful experience-totality back to an

original givenness, then we can state that the point of departure for this divergence is already present in the difference between the two theories of abstraction, as mentioned.

Nevertheless, in this way Cassirer cuts away the entire phenomenological eidetic that will derive, although in a problematic way, from the concept of species. It must be emphasised that he does this because he cannot consider intuition a valid source of knowledge, which is always a construction as it requires *formation* at its very core. Even 'pure' intuition, considered the foundation of mathematics and geometry by Kant, is only a historical inheritance to be overcome by the revision of classical physics.³ Thus, Cassirer must refuse both intuition, in general, and ideative abstraction, in particular.

Another consequence of this refusal is created by Cassirer's positing of a forward-looking perspective as a methodological condition of inquiry. To understand how consciousness expresses its order and its unity in the manifold of single manifestations held together in a symbolic form, Cassirer rejects the possibility of a backward turn and refuses to consider the possibility of reaching the original, immediate source of experience. This direction of reflection is simply a mystic attempt and cannot be successful, observes Cassirer (1980, 113f.) at the end of the *Introduction* already quoted. From this point of view, Husserl's effort to reach an original givenness, by turning back to look, and moving back toward a bond between activity and passivity, between spontaneity and receptivity, as we see in the entirety of genetic phenomenology, and specifically in the *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (Husserl 2001a, 115, 220, 361ff.), as well as in the manuscripts collected in the volume on *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Husserl 2013, 5f., 31, 117, 132f., 219, 223, 462), is for Cassirer simply a form of mysticism, entirely in vain, and not to be taken as philosophical method. From this perspective,

³ See Cassirer (1957, 473): "What we define as the ultimate physical reality has cast of all appearance of thingness: there is no longer any meaning in speaking of one and the same matter at different times. And yet here again the abandonment of thingness does not impair the objectivity of physics but grounds it in a new deeper sense. For this objectivity is no problem of representation; it is a pure problem of meaning. What we call the object is no longer a schematizable, intuitively realizable 'something' with definite spatial and temporal predicates; it is a point of unity to be apprehended in a purely intellectual way. The object as such can never be 'represented': in accordance with the definition which Kant worked out clearly in principle, it is a mere X 'in relation to which representation have synthetic unity.'"

the symbolic mediation and the unity between singularity and universality that symbolic pregnancy attempts to express take the form of a necessary distance from the origin which cannot be questioned; the more we construct our forms of experiential signification, the more we move away from this origin.

Thus, we return to the question of whether symbolic pregnancy can be seen as a phenomenological concept. Our response must be, insofar as it has been constructed on the same model of the mathematical theory of abstraction sketched out in *Substance and Function*, that this is not possible, which may indeed suggest new paths of research on the compatibility between Cassirer's method of critique of culture and Husserl's phenomenology.

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Husserl and Cassirer on Mythical Thought and Cultural Crisis

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Abstract: The present chapter makes a case for comparing Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, and for examining these texts as responses to a cultural crisis of the interwar period. It is argued that Husserl's and Cassirer's respective texts may, in spite of their important differences, be helpfully understood as criticisms of a Heideggerian conception of the place of philosophy within culture, and as a defense of something closer to an Enlightenment conception of philosophical reason, which is nonetheless informed by Plato. Neither Husserl nor Cassirer is dismissive of mythical and other culturally localized attitudes, however, but seeks to understand these as providing the cultural context from within which the purely theoretical attitude of transcendental idealism originates. In this regard, Husserl and Cassirer may be understood to recognize the importance of cultural history in conditioning the horizons of human understanding, without, however, renouncing the ideal possibility of a theoretical perspective unprejudiced by culturally specific inheritances.

Keywords: Husserl, Cassirer, Heidegger, Myth, Transcendental Idealism, Platonism, Enlightenment, Crisis

1 Introduction

In view of certain striking similarities of theme, background, and motivation, Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and Cassirer's *The Myth of the State* seem readily to invite a comparative assessment

which, however, they are, as yet, far from having received. The texts in question are amongst the posthumously published works of two of the 20th century's most esteemed Germanophone philosophers, each of whom had either left Germany or been subject to anti-Semitic legislation, following the rise to power of Hitler's Nazi Party. Both texts bear the imprint of their respective author's traumatic experience of a cultural catastrophe which had challenged an earlier confidence in Europe's progressive historical trajectory, and each text conveys an attempt at a philosophical understanding of the interwar crisis.

There are, however, a number of possible obstacles to any such comparative study. Cassirer's text has generally been received as a work of political theory, for instance, whereas Husserl's is concerned with issues in theoretical philosophy. Moreover, neither author discusses the other at any great length in either of the texts in question, and there are broader points of philosophical disagreement – particularly those concerning the viability of presuppositionless access to immediately given phenomena – which might be thought to make a nonsense of any effort to interpret Husserl and Cassirer as participants in a common endeavor. A further complication centers upon the differences between Husserl's and Cassirer's respective treatments of myth and the mythical imagination in these and related works. Myth features more prominently in Cassirer's works than in Husserl's, but provides a focus, nonetheless, for a number of important discussions to which Husserl devotes his attention in the 1920s and 1930s, concerning the nature of exact science and the conditions from which it emerges. Whereas, however, Husserl sets myth in stark contrast to the rigorous scientific ideal which he never abandons, Cassirer treats mythical thought as one of a number of incommensurable 'symbolic forms,' by means of which a conception of the world becomes possible. What Husserl seems, therefore, to denigrate for its pre-scientific status, Cassirer holds in no lower esteem than any of the various other symbolic forms which he discusses, including that of physical science. For Husserl, it seems, myth suffers by comparison against a universally authoritative standard which, however, Cassirer does not recognize.

The hypothesis to be explored in the present chapter is that apparent differences in their respective understandings of mythical thought are no real obstacle to a comparative study of Husserl's *Crisis* and Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, and that these texts are in fact united by a common anxiety regarding the displacement of certain cultural practices, previously aspiring to rational status, by forms of

mythical consciousness. In spite of their apparent disagreement over the availability of an unconditionally valid standard against which it is possible to compare mythical and scientific attitudes, Husserl and Cassirer agree that scientific reason merits a sphere of decisive influence in modern culture, and that its demotion and subordination to mythical forms of consciousness during the interwar period represents a cultural crisis. Hence, it is the right of scientific reason to a domain of its own, unconditioned by the myths local to any particular culture, that Husserl and Cassirer intend to preserve against fashions of thought acknowledging no such autonomous rational science within the historically-conditioned horizons of one's society.

The argument of the present chapter is developed over six sections, the first of which introduces the Platonic ideal of unconditional knowledge to which Husserl traces the origins of those 'European sciences' whose autonomy he seeks to defend in the *Crisis*. Section Two outlines the attitude which Husserl presents as preceding and rivaling that 'theoretical' standpoint in which, he maintains, autonomous science originates. The third section examines Husserl's later notion of the lifeworld, showing exact science to share a cultural source with myth, and all other forms of culture, without renouncing its aspiration to absolute unconditionality. Section four compares Husserl's understanding of the mythical attitude with Cassirer's account of myth as one of a number of 'symbolic forms.' In section five, Heidegger's *Being and Time* is presented as a common target for Husserl's *Crisis* and Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, insofar as Heidegger denies the viability of that autonomous scientific outlook which Husserl and Cassirer seek to preserve within the broader context of a cultural source common to all intersubjective forms of understanding. In section six, Husserl and Cassirer are presented as inheritors of a Platonic idealist tradition which Heidegger aims to overcome.

2 Husserl's Platonic Conception of Science

During the summer of 1935, shortly before the Prague lectures which were to form the basis of his *Crisis* text, Husserl would lament that "[a] powerful and constantly growing current of philosophy which renounces scientific discipline [...] is inundating European humanity" (Husserl 1970, 390). By this time, 'Europe' had come to mean for Husserl, not merely one culture or geographical region amongst

others, but a rational ideal of universal significance, originating in ancient Greece but offering itself as a model for humanity in general. For Husserl then, what is at stake in ‘European’ humanity’s encounter with the ‘unscientific’ philosophical tendencies in question is nothing less than the spirit of thoroughgoing criticism by which autonomous reason holds itself accountable – in its theoretical and practical commitments – to the highest possible standards of rational scrutiny.

According to Husserl, moreover, it is with Plato that such a ‘European’ ideal of scientific reason originates. In his 1923/24 *First Philosophy* lectures, Husserl remarks, for instance, that “the tendency which more than anything else is characteristic of European culture was first awakened in the genius of Plato, viz. the tendency towards universal rationalization by means of a science that fashions itself rationally” (Husserl 2019, 16). What is original to Plato, in Husserl’s view, is the profound refusal to settle for mere opinion, or *doxa*, in place of genuine knowledge, or *episteme*, and the absolute commitment to accept nothing whatsoever without sufficient justification. Only with Plato, in Husserl’s view, is the supreme normative authority of reason first recognized, along with the demand to govern one’s thoughts and actions in accordance with the highest rational standards.

With respect to the historical roots of what he will here term “science in the pregnant sense,” and later “the European sciences,” Husserl remarks, in his 1929 *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, that:

[o]nly in a loose sense do we still refer to the philosophies of the pre-Platonic age, or similar cultural formations of other peoples and times, as sciences. Only as preliminary forms, as stages preliminary to science, do we accept them. Science in a new sense arises in the first instance from *Plato’s establishing of logic*, as a place for exploring the essential requirements of “genuine” knowledge and “genuine” science and thus discovering norms, in conformity with which a science consciously justifying its method and theory by norms, might be built. In intention this logical justification is a justification deriving entirely from pure principles. (Husserl 1969, 1)

By crediting him with the foundation of logic as a resource for distinguishing genuine from counterfeit justification, Husserl seems in this passage to attribute to Plato a status customarily reserved for Aristotle. By ‘logic,’ however, Husserl has in mind not the analysis and classification of deductively valid forms of inference,

but rather the insightful grasp of absolutely unconditional normative standards of reason. Plato's great innovation, according to Husserl, and the insight which marks the beginning of European science, is to have understood the standards for authentic knowledge as independent of any actual state of affairs, and therefore as not being contingent upon the existence of any particular object or matter of fact. With Plato, Husserl maintains, there arises the recognition that it is only by appeal to *ideal* standards unconditioned by whatever might happen in fact to be the case, that a distinction between *doxa* and *episteme* is possible, and hence that the norms of scientific rigor originate not in the history of any actual practice, but rather in certain atemporal principles available to rational insight. Hence, according to Husserl, "Plato was set on the path to the pure idea" and to the pursuit of a criterion of adequacy for which *de facto* "scientific" practices could offer no precedent (ibid., 2).

Instead of consulting those methods historically enacted in the practices of earlier investigators, Husserl maintains, Plato seeks to locate the principles constitutive of scientific understanding within the idea of reason itself. For Husserl then, genuine science is accountable, with the dawn of Plato's dialectic, to ideal standards uncompromised by the limits of any achievement which might be referenced in the actual course of human history. As Husserl interprets him, Plato is animated by anti-skeptical motives and takes it as his responsibility to establish the possibility of genuine science, without assuming the point at issue by taking for granted the epistemic credentials of any existing practice. In order to satisfy the skeptic-proof standard demanded of genuine *episteme*, Husserl maintains, Platonic science requires of its adherents

[...] that radicalness which unremittingly imposes on itself the demand to accept no knowledge that cannot be accounted for by originarily first principles, which are at the same time matters of perfect insight – principles such that profounder inquiry makes no sense. (Ibid., 4)

Hence, for Husserl, Platonic science involves a commitment to the absolutely watertight grounding of all possible knowledge in apodictically secure principles available to rational insight. Nothing short of the unintelligibility of any request for further elaboration of some item of knowledge and its justificatory grounds can indicate that enough has been done to meet the requirements of Platonic science as understood by Husserl.

That such maximally ambitious standards have remained largely unmet during the roughly two and a half thousand years since Plato's death does not, according to Husserl, count against the Platonic ideal from which they derive. More important than its complete realization, he maintains, and what gives Platonic science its privileged status within 'European' culture, is the stimulus which it provides for the increasingly greater approximation of a standard of perfect adequacy to which, perhaps, humanly possible scientific achievements may never correspond. According to Husserl, the ideal of Platonic science functions as something like a Kantian regulative idea, directing and coordinating the pursuit of knowledge in each of its many fields towards an infinitely distant target. Such an ideal, Husserl maintains, provides 'Europe' with a *telos* of its own – one marked by the future-oriented pursuit of greater knowledge refinement up to a point beyond which further improvement is inconceivable. It is this project which, according to Husserl, has come under threat with the advent of certain skeptical-relativist forms of life-philosophy, historicism and hermeneutic phenomenology.

3 Husserl and the Mythical-Practical Attitude

According to Husserl, 'European' history is distinguished by its teleological orientation towards an ideal of scientific completeness. The history of 'Europe' is then, for Husserl, that of the progressive realization of this Platonic ideal and of its growing influence in human affairs. What Husserl calls the 'crisis' of the European sciences – the waning impetus of this Platonic ideal and its failure to inspire the same enthusiastic commitment as during such earlier periods as the Renaissance and Enlightenment – is, first and foremost, an incredulity with respect to the 'European' historical exceptionality, and a widespread hesitation to accept that there is anything of *universal* significance in the cultural inheritance of 'Europe.' At the heart of the crisis, Husserl maintains, is the suspicion that Plato did not discover a rational ideal of transhistorical and transcultural appeal, and that it is nothing of interest to unconditionally authoritative norms of human reason which accounts for the general trajectory of 'European' history, but rather a set of culturally specific values and standards which are therefore without any independent claim upon one. As such, it is foremost amongst the tasks which Husserl assigns for himself in the *Crisis* to assess "whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute

idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like 'China' or 'India'" (Husserl 1970, 16).

When distinguishing 'Europe' from such cultural traditions as those of China and India, Husserl differentiates, in his 1935 *Vienna Lecture*, between the 'theoretical' and 'mythical-religious' or 'mythical-practical' attitudes. What principally distinguish the attitudes in question, according to Husserl, are their respective priorities and agendas. The theoretical is animated by a commitment to the intrinsic value of scientifically rigorous knowledge, whereas the mythical-practical is primarily occupied with satisfying a natural human demand for solace and comfort in the face of disappointment, tragedy, and distress. In either case, the attitude in question constitutes a fundamental mode of 'making intelligible,' referring particular phenomena to a network of meanings which provides a general context of significance. As such, phenomena 'matter' to the mythical-practical attitude in so far as they show up as relevant to one's practical interests, the most fundamental of which are common amongst religions. Within the mythical-practical attitude, Husserl maintains, it is primarily with respect to their implications for human salvation and well-being that phenomena distinguish themselves as significant. Hence, while not denying that real knowledge and insight often results from within the mythical-practical attitude, Husserl also insists that this is never the primary objective of such a practically-oriented outlook, but only an incidental outcome of its relating to phenomena in its characteristically pre-theoretical manner. Hence, Husserl maintains, theoretical knowledge must remain of secondary interest to practical 'wisdom' as far as the mythical-practical attitude is concerned.

The mythical-practical attitude, Husserl maintains, is common to every civilization within which the purely theoretical outlook has yet to achieve a status of cultural pre-eminence, and this, he claims, is not only a contingent fact of empirical anthropology, but "a necessity essentially available to insight" (ibid., 283). Hence, for Husserl, the mythical-practical attitude is something like the 'default setting' of human civilization, owing to essentially grounded truths about how any culture must articulate its consciousness of phenomena in the absence of a purely theoretical outlook. It was in ancient Greece, Husserl maintains, that the theoretical attitude originated, and the story of its subsequent development has been that of 'Europe.'

What principally defines the mythical-practical attitude according to Husserl is that it concerns the world as a totality and in an exclusively practical manner.

In Husserl's view, the mythical-practical attitude liberates consciousness from its confinement to an awareness of isolated local phenomena by making thematic a notion of world as the unified setting for all possible experience, in the light of which it becomes possible for particulars to take on a global significance. To the mythical consciousness, for instance, it is not merely *this* particular river, with *these* specific features that is encountered, but a sign of a power common to all natural phenomena, or part of a narrative which concerns the totality of what is, has been or will be. In spite of its breadth of scope, however, the mythical-practical attitude remains exclusively practically-oriented, interpreting phenomena as significant only in terms of their implications for human well-being. Hence, according to Husserl:

[...] insofar as the whole world is seen as thoroughly dominated by mythical powers, so that man's fate depends mediately or immediately upon the way in which they hold sway, a universal mythical world-view is possibly incited by praxis and then itself becomes a practically interested world-view. (Husserl 1970, 284)

As such, the mythical-practical attitude originates in those concerns and demands which arise from the human subject's hopes and anxieties, providing a narrative framework with which to understand the phenomena of experience as related features of a totality answering to fundamental emotional needs.

However, it is not only its practical orientation which distinguishes the mythical-religious from the theoretical attitude, but also its cultural relativity. Despite purporting to offer an account of the world as a whole, the terms in which the mythical-practical attitude makes phenomena intelligible are exclusive to the members of a specific people or community. Unlike the theoretical attitude then, the mythical-practical attitude does not aspire to provide an unconditionally valid account of the world as a whole, authoritative across all cultures. As Dermot Moran puts it:

The key point – and Husserl emphasizes this in his “Vienna Lecture” – is that myth offers a comprehensive account of the world as a whole. It is a way of envisaging the *universal world*, albeit construed in terms specific to that people. It possesses universality but has not conceived of the infinite tasks

that would set it on the pathway to genuine theoretical science. (Moran 2012, 157)

To renounce the theoretical attitude, is therefore, according to Husserl, to limit one's horizons to an understanding of the world which is relative to the historical experience of a certain people. This, however, is precisely what Husserl fears has become a genuine possibility with the emergence of the 'irrationalist' philosophies which he intends to target.

4 Husserl and the Route from the Lifeworld to Science

In December 1925, Husserl identifies two distinct routes to the transcendental phenomenology which he champions (Husserl 2019, 469). The first of these, familiar to later audiences through his influential *Cartesian Meditations*, highlights the incomplete rationality of the sciences, owing to the obscurity of their evidential grounds, and motivates Husserl to examine the pure ego and its meaning-constitutive acts in search of an absolutely transparent ground of scientific understanding. A second, less often discussed, route to transcendental phenomenology, begins from a contrast between what Husserl calls the mythical-practical and the theoretical worldviews, and leads to an investigation of the experience of consciousness from within the latter perspective. Unfortunately, however, this second route is more gestured towards than scrupulously examined in the manuscript in question, nor does Husserl proceed elsewhere in any of his published works to develop a way to transcendental phenomenology explicitly in terms of any such distinction between theoretical and mythical-practical attitudes. It is not implausible, however, to suppose that Husserl's distinction bears fruit in his final, historically-focused writings, wherein the theoretical attitude characteristic of 'European science,' and finally realized in the 'break-through' to transcendental phenomenology, is presented as an abstraction from the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*) by which all possible experience is conditioned.

Husserl's later notion of the lifeworld is one of the most contentious and argued-over in his entire corpus. Most fundamentally, the lifeworld – which precedes all theoretical constructions – is, for Husserl, the world common to oneself

and one's co-subjects or co-agents, and that in which life 'goes on,' in the sense that it is the domain of ordinary, everyday concern, and provides the environment within which one's most basic attitudes are shaped. The lifeworld is therefore the subject's 'natural habitat,' so to speak, according to Husserl, and that to which one's attention is naturally directed, outside of such specialized pursuits as theoretical physics and pure mathematics. Time within the lifeworld, for instance, is punctuated by socially-mediated episodes of such personal significance as weddings, funerals, and anniversaries of events in the history of a community. Since it is essentially something held in common, the lifeworld is experienced as inhabited by others with whom one shares a basic understanding. What is more, Husserl maintains, the 'bracketing' of all theoretical commitments involves a re-direction of one's attention to the lifeworld – albeit as a pure phenomenon – and hence it is within the lifeworld that there originate all those appearances, the refinement and meditation upon which provides the material for the exact sciences. As such, by the time of the *Crisis*, Husserl has come to view the European sciences as sharing a common origin with all those cultural phenomena, including myths, which condition, and are conditioned by, the life of a historical community. Hence, as David Bell remarks, "[i]n Husserl's last works, and especially in the *Crisis*, (inter-subjective) history comes to perform the same role with respect to transcendental philosophy that (individual) psychology had performed in his earlier works" (Bell 1990, 231).

Like many other commentators, Bell takes the historically-conditioned foundation of Husserl's later works to fatally compromise the ideal of unconditional knowledge which he champions elsewhere. David Carr, for instance, is far from unusual in his suspicion that there is a profound tension between Husserl's transcendental and historical orientations (Carr 1974). While acknowledging the historicity and idiosyncrasy, however, of the intersubjective contexts which condition one's cognitive achievements, Husserl explicitly maintains that local variations across different cultures do not eradicate a universal essence to the lifeworld, so that all possible communities share a set of structures constitutive of a common world. Hence, according to Husserl:

[...] the lifeworld does have, in all its relative features, a *general structure*. This general structure, to which everything that exists relatively is bound, is not itself relative. We can attend to it in its generality and, with

sufficient care, fix it for once and for all in a way equally accessible to all. As lifeworld the world has even prior to science, the “same” structures that the objective sciences presuppose in their substruction of a world which exists “in itself” and is determined through “truths in themselves.” (Husserl 1970, 139)

Clearly then, for Husserl, the project of universal science does not dissolve in the face of numerous insurmountable regional differences, but finds a foundation in a domain of pre-theoretical experience common to all cultures. The theoretical attitude is not to be engulfed, then, by the lifeworld, but grounded within it. Though many of his interpreters do not share his optimism, the lifeworld is seen by Husserl, therefore, as a foundation of stone, rather than quicksand.

Unfortunately, in its incomplete state, the *Crisis* provides little more than promissory notes for an account of the grounding of universal science in the lifeworld. All the same, Husserl’s disagreement with his ‘irrationalist’ target is clear – in spite of all of the historical particularities which distinguish cultures, there remains a foundational unity to the lifeworld, which enables the possibility of universal science. According to Husserl, the theoretical attitude – whose fullest realization is to be found in his own transcendental phenomenology – emerges from out of the mythical-practical or mythical-religious attitude, but this does not mean that there is no prospect of a scientific understanding which is not conditioned by mythical and other culturally specific features. Rather, the abstractive capacity afforded by eidetic reduction makes possible a comprehension of phenomena in terms of essences not particular to one culture or another, but as a priori constitutive structures of a general class of objects. As such, Husserl identifies something paradoxical in European history: ‘Europe’ is, on the one hand, one historically-situated culture amongst others, and, on the other, an ideal of universal significance motivating the overcoming of those very historical conditions from which it emerged and to which its origins may be traced. How such a self-transcending ‘breakthrough’ to a perspective unconditioned by its own historical conditions of possibility could be made is a central concern of such late Husserlian works as *The Origin of Geometry*, but not one to which very many of his successors in the phenomenological movement deem Husserl to have adequately responded (Husserl 1970, 269–299).

5 Cassirer's Understanding of Myth

In terms of his understanding of myth and its relation to science, Husserl bears comparison with his esteemed contemporary, Cassirer. For Cassirer too, myth is sharply distinguishable from science, belonging to a distinct set of standards for making sense of phenomena. What is more, Cassirer and Husserl agree that myth establishes the horizons for an understanding of the world as a whole, albeit in terms relative to a particular people. According to both Husserl and Cassirer then, the mythical imagination is ethnocentric – not necessarily in the sense of assuming the superiority of one culture as compared to others, but in the sense of interpreting the world from a perspective specific to some particular culture. Most importantly, perhaps, for Cassirer, far from being merely haphazard and without principle, the products of the mythical imagination display a systematic unity and are intelligible according to general rules. As Cassirer remarks in his most extensive work on the topic:

The philosophical understanding of myth begins with the insight that it does not move in a purely invented or made-up world but has its own mode of *necessity* and therefore, in accordance with the idealist conception of the object, its own mode of *reality*. (Cassirer 1955b, 4)

According to the idealist position to which Cassirer here alludes, the reality of an object consists in the necessity of a rule according to which representations are generated and inter-related. Just as, for instance, the reality of the Eiffel Tower consists, like that of any physical object according to the Kantian position at hand, in the subordination of possible experience to a rule necessitating the kinds of sensible appearances given under various conditions, the objects of myth are 'real' in so far as they may be grasped in terms of fixed principles. Myth is not mere fancy, therefore, for Cassirer, but the product of a rule prescribing various kinds of synthetic unity amongst possible representations.

Like theoretical science, myth admits of transcendental investigation, according to Cassirer, insofar as both may be examined in terms of their respective conditions of possibility. Either practice may be understood in terms of its own set of constitutive principles which may be inferred from available examples of the practices in question. As is customary amongst neo-Kantians of his generation,

Cassirer pursues an analytic rather than synthetic transcendental method which takes certain established facts – such as those of the physical sciences – as premises, the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of which it then aims to uncover. Cassirer's transcendental method is therefore similar to that of Kant's *Prolegomena*, which is organized around an account of the possibility of the exact sciences as known to the late 18th century (Kant 2001, 17). Like Husserl, however, Cassirer objects, as Ferrari notes, to the narrow scope of Kant's procedure, which limits its attention to the mathematical sciences (Ferrari 2010, 296ff.). For Cassirer, as for Husserl, the exact sciences are amongst a number of cultural practices admitting of transcendental investigation, and Kant's exclusive focus on physics and mathematics reflects a naturalistic bias which understates the reality of those objects with which the cultural sciences are concerned. According to both Cassirer and Husserl, culture is, no less than nature, the law-governed object of reality-constitutive rules for the synthesis of representations. What is more, since the ground of their objectivity is in both cases the same transcendental subject, neither nature nor culture has any greater claim to reality according to Husserl and Cassirer. As such, to assert shortcomings of the mythical imagination for the reason that it fails to satisfy the standards of proper scientific understanding is, for both Husserl and Cassirer, no less confused than to criticize the exact sciences for their failure to fit the criteria of myth. In either case, one principled means of object-representation is judged according to the standards of another, with predictable results.

Importantly, for Cassirer, it is only relative to the object-constitutive standards of one or another form of symbolic understanding – such as science, language, or myth – that distinctions between true and false, real and unreal, have any legitimate application. As Friedman puts it, the 'naïve realist' prejudice of looking for "any ultimate metaphysical unity, in the unity and simplicity of an absolute 'world-ground' subsisting behind the irreducible diversity of our various presentations of reality, is [for Cassirer] the fatal 'dogmatic' (meaning 'non-critical') philosophical error" (Friedman 2000, 97). Hence, Cassirer maintains, the perspective of the natural sciences does not enjoy any uniquely privileged access to reality *tout court*, and is not qualified to judge the mythical imagination from any independent standpoint. Because, for Cassirer, science and myth are alike symbolic forms consistent with their own respective constitutive principles, neither is qualified to criticize the other.

The unavailability of a presuppositionless standpoint uniquely qualified to assess the credentials of any prospective belief or commitment represents, of course, a monumental departure from Husserl's epistemic ideals. For Cassirer, there is no cognitive achievement which is not the product of one or another symbolic form, and since "all symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy" (Cassirer 1946b, 7), Husserl's ambitions for a rigorous science grounded in immediately verifiable data cannot be other than naïve. There is no pretense, in Cassirer's writings, to have achieved a perspective from which all contentious assumptions have been 'bracketed,' nor is this presented as a viable aspiration. This is not to suggest, however, that Cassirer numbers amongst those skeptical irrationalists whose relativistic disavowals of philosophy's scientific potential Husserl identifies with a crisis of the European sciences. While not sharing Husserl's enthusiasm for the pursuit of a single unified and exhaustive science, incorporating all fields of knowledge, Cassirer does not deny either that theoretical science is a practice essentially distinguishable and autonomous from myth, or that even the products of the mythical imagination display a systematic structure by virtue of which they are intelligible according to a common set of principles. Like Husserl, Cassirer is committed to a transcendental philosophical method, and understands philosophy to be possible as rigorous science in so far as it is capable of following a rational procedure for identifying the enabling conditions of various cultural phenomena.

6 Cassirer's Critique of Heidegger

Although Husserl does not, in the *Crisis*, mention his former protégé by name, it is widely held that Heidegger is amongst the principal targets of that work. According to Moran, for instance, the *Crisis* was, for Husserl, an opportunity to correct hostile misinterpretations of his transcendental phenomenology which had been propagated by Heidegger and others (Moran 2012, 48). For Hopkins, moreover, the *Crisis* is a defense of Husserl's vision of phenomenology against a Heideggerian competitor (Hopkins 2011, 10). What is more, Luft maintains that Heidegger's suspicions concerning the notion of the transcendental ego are, for Husserl, tantamount to a renunciation of that ideal of "philosophy as rigorous science," the abandonment of which "ultimately accounts for the *crisis* of the European sciences in general" (Luft 2011, 147).

Cassirer, certainly, does not hesitate, in *The Myth of the State*, to identify Heidegger's *Being and Time* as the antithesis of Husserl's scientific ambitions. Hence he remarks that:

[Husserl's] highest aim was to make philosophy an "exact science," to found it upon unshakeable facts and indubitable principles. Such a tendency is entirely alien to Heidegger. He does not admit that there is something like "eternal" truth, a Platonic "realm of ideas," or a strict logical method of philosophical thought. All this is declared to be elusive. In vain we try to build up a logical philosophy; we can only give an *Existentialphilosophie*. Such an existential philosophy does not claim to give us an objective and universally valid truth. (Cassirer 1946a, 293)

As such, Cassirer maintains, Heidegger does not share Husserl's scientific aspirations for philosophy. To employ Husserl's terminology, Cassirer accuses Heidegger of renouncing the theoretical attitude for a mythical-practical alternative which abandons any hope of overcoming certain culturally-specific inheritances which inhibit the possibility of a universal perspective from which to articulate a comprehensive body of unconditionally valid insights.

As Cassirer interprets him, Heidegger takes all humanly possible understanding to be mired within the confines of a historical tradition, such that the Husserlian aspiration to a perspective external to, and unqualified by, specifics of time and place displays a hopeless naivety. According to Cassirer, Heidegger insists upon the situatedness of all understanding, and its conditionality upon a perspective from *within* an environment into which the agent is inexplicably 'thrown.' There lies at the heart of all understanding, Cassirer takes Heidegger to maintain, an inherited tradition of sense-making, which may be more or less understood but never circumnavigated entirely. As such, Cassirer highlights Heidegger's commitment to *Dasein's Geworfenheit* or "thrownness" – the radical contingency which is at the source of all human understanding and which conditions its horizons (Heidegger 1962, 174). In thus holding that the demand for unconditionally valid science is fatally compromised by the limits of the very tradition from which it originates, Heidegger renounces, according to Cassirer, any notion of being accountable to standards other than those particular to his own historical community. For Cassirer then, Heidegger is complicit in the failure of

inter-war Germany to resist a slide into ethnocentric patterns of thought. Hence Cassirer declares that:

[...] a theory that sees in the *Geworfenheit* of man one of his principal characters [has] given up all hopes of an active share in the construction and reconstruction of man's cultural life. Such philosophy renounces its own fundamental theoretical ideals. It can be used, then, as a pliable instrument in the hands of the political leaders (Cassirer 1946a, 293).

Taken in the context of the larger work from which this passage is taken, Cassirer appears here to identify Heidegger – whose affiliation with the Nazi Party during the 1930s is well-known – as an accomplice in a 20th century catastrophe by which self-consciously mythical modes of thought came to occupy positions of disproportionate cultural influence in such advanced economies as Germany. Like Husserl, Cassirer is dismayed by the willingness of certain philosophers to cede ground to cultural forces reluctant to acknowledge common and mutually intelligible reference points across cultures. There is a broadly cosmopolitan and liberal vision at stake in Husserl's and Cassirer's respective projects, which welcomes the sharing of cultural space amongst various practices of understanding and is wary of insularizing tendencies which limit the influence of universalizing forces. Heidegger's philosophy is antithetical to Husserl's and Cassirer's insofar as it disputes the capacity of theoretical science and other practices aspiring to universal relevance, to outgrow the historical conditioning of their cultural origins and to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. The social consequences of Heidegger's thought, according to Cassirer, are to further undermine public confidence in the distinction between myth and science, and hence to compromise the prestige and influence of those cultural groups and actors that might otherwise have inhibited the increasing cultural presence, during the interwar period, of mythical ways of thinking which were ultimately to quash, displace and exclude scientific voices, with catastrophic results.

While not endorsing Husserl's grandiose assessment of the philosophical vocation as that by which we act as "*functionaries of mankind*" (Husserl 1970, 17), there is implicit in Cassirer's criticism of Heidegger a commitment to the philosopher's responsibility to participate actively in the direction of a community's cultural life. Philosophers ought not, according to Cassirer, to overestimate their position and

significance within the dynamics of any culture, but nor ought they to lose sight of their claim to a distinct share of cultural influence by means of which rationalizing tendencies may confront and withstand countervailing social trends intent upon subordinating scientific to mythical ways of thinking. Heidegger's conception of philosophy as hermeneutic phenomenological ontology, interpreting the understanding of being which lies within a historical tradition's self-understanding, seems for Cassirer to limit the philosopher's cultural influence beyond any capacity to intervene productively in the rational shaping of a society's direction. Like Husserl, Cassirer is an heir of the 18th century Enlightenment, and committed to the socially transformative power of reason in shaping cultural history. For Heidegger, however, the Enlightenment conception of rationality, and its elevated cultural status are symptomatic of the long history of ontological forgetfulness which lie at the very origins of the Platonic philosophical tradition of which Husserl and Cassirer are such self-consciously devoted followers.

7 Husserl and Cassirer *contra* Heidegger on the Platonic Legacy

It is informative, in comparing Heidegger with Husserl and Cassirer, to examine their respective approaches to the history of philosophy from Plato until the early 20th century. Whereas for Husserl and Cassirer, Plato represents the origins of an idealist tradition of which they are themselves the inheritors, Heidegger traces to Plato's monumental influence the obfuscation of being which he identifies within Western metaphysics. According to Heidegger, the seed of the Western philosophical tradition's ontological forgetfulness was sown early, with Plato's identification of being with an entity, to which the human agent is principally related as a knower. With this problematic development, Heidegger maintains, Western thought took its first step on a detour away from the primordial ontological understanding which had guided the pre-Socratic and towards an epistemic conception of the human relation to being. The Western philosophical tradition, Heidegger maintains, is the legacy of a Platonic detachment from being as that which is, so to speak, 'present to beholding.' For Heidegger, then, it is with Plato that there originates the understanding of being primarily in terms of "presence-to-hand," that is, as availability to scrutiny

and inspection (Heidegger 1962, 82). In fact, however, presence-to-hand is a derivative and secondary understanding of being, according to Heidegger, which obscures the ‘readiness-to-hand’ with which being initially reveals itself in a practical context within which the human agent is concernfully situated (Heidegger, 1962, 98). The condition in which Western humanity finds itself during the inter-war period, Heidegger maintains, is one of ontological confusion and rootless detachment from a primordial understanding of being which cannot be recovered without rediscovering the vitality of the historical tradition in which it originates – an effort which requires the thoroughgoing re-evaluation of modern scientific culture.

Such misgivings concerning the Platonic inheritance are for Husserl, however, symptomatic of the very crisis of scientific culture which he intends to address in his final works. Despite his anxieties concerning the positivistic developments which have troubled the post-Galilean era, Husserl’s later call for a retrieval of the lifeworld as theme of phenomenological study is not intended to subvert the cultural prestige of the Platonic legacy, but rather to reveal the mundane origins of the exact sciences, and hence to dispel the misconception that the theoretical attitude from which they spring is an artificial construction radically detached from the phenomena of ordinary experience. For Husserl, unlike Heidegger, Europe’s Platonic inheritance is to be revisited rather than corrected.

Cassirer understands the history of philosophy in a manner similar to Husserl, presenting the Western philosophical tradition as a progressive journey of enlightened development for which an original Platonic ideal provides the initial impetus. As Friedman remarks:

Cassirer [...] articulates an interpretation of the history of modern philosophy as the development and eventual triumph of what he calls “modern philosophical idealism.” This tradition takes its inspiration, according to Cassirer, from idealism in the Platonic sense, from an appreciation for the “ideal” formal structures paradigmatically studied in mathematics, and it is distinctively modern in recognizing the fundamental importance of the systematic application of such structures to empirically given nature in modern mathematical physics – a progressive and synthetic process wherein mathematical models of nature are successively refined and corrected without limit. (Friedman 2000, 88)

For Cassirer then, Heidegger is an arch-reactionary whose hostility to the universalizing and formalizing tendencies of the Platonic tradition is entirely consistent with his celebration of the mythical understandings of being which originate in the distant history of a people. While not intending to denigrate the very real understanding of which the mythical imagination is the author, or even to demote its objects to an order of being less authentic than that of the theoretical sciences, Cassirer sees genuine progress and enlightenment, rather than decline and obfuscation, to have resulted from the theoretical ideals which the philosophical tradition owes to Plato. Because he associates myth and science with distinct and incommensurable symbolic forms, Cassirer does not take the preservation of the one to be incompatible with the advance of the other, nor does he think that a culture stands to recuperate a more authentic understanding of itself and its existential predicament by treating the aspiration to universal ideals as a denial of a more profound self-conception.

As such, there are two respects in which Husserl and Cassirer may be understood as embracing, and Heidegger as seeking to overcome, a Platonic inheritance. First, Husserl and Cassirer endorse, whereas Heidegger rejects, the privileged position which epistemology has enjoyed within the Western philosophical tradition. For Heidegger, the philosophical tradition's preoccupation with epistemology is symptomatic of its early misconstrual of being in terms of objecthood, to which humans are principally related in the mode of 'beholding.' The respective species of transcendental idealism which Husserl and Cassirer each advance, however, are inspired by recognizably Kantian responses to epistemic concerns central to the philosophical tradition. Second, Husserl and Cassirer follow Plato in maintaining that it is with the universal forms of the objects of possible representation that philosophy is principally concerned, whereas Heidegger sees this as further confirmation of the tradition's overlooking of being as revealed in the context of pre-theoretical communal life. In both of these respects, moreover, Husserl and Cassirer may be understood to share a common resistance to such anti-Enlightenment ideologies resurgent during the interwar period as were intent upon the cultural subordination of universal rational norms to mythical narratives by which a people were thought to affirm a collective identity threatened by an alien and characteristically 'modern' cultural affliction. While distinguishing in principle between theoretical and mythical forms of understanding, Husserl and Cassirer do not identify accountability to rational norms with the straightforward rejection

of myth and hence do not suppose that the historically-conditioned narratives and rituals partially constitutive of a collective identity are necessarily incompatible with a commitment to universal normative standards of scientific rigor. Whereas, however, Husserl sees the mythical-practical attitude as the genetic ground for the emergence of the theoretical attitude with which it comes to share one and the same lifeworld, myth and science are for Cassirer distinct symbolic forms without any common standard or horizon.

8 Conclusion

It has been argued over the six preceding sections of the present chapter that Husserl and Cassirer share a general understanding of the Western philosophical tradition as the development of a theoretical ideal originating with Plato, and that their respective posthumous works, the *Crisis* and *The Myth of the State*, express a common anxiety at the threat to this ideal presented by an interwar cultural reaction which finds philosophical expression in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Contrary to appearances, and in spite of real differences in their respective understandings of the relations between myth and science in post-enlightenment culture, Husserl and Cassirer are not so unlike in their approaches to the mythical imagination as to lack a common target in their respective accounts of the anti-scientific cultural forces which threaten to undermine the rationalistic inheritance bequeathed by the Platonic tradition. As such, and notwithstanding their important methodological disagreements concerning the viability of presuppositionless access to the phenomena which ground possible scientific knowledge of objects, Husserl and Cassirer may be understood to share a common Platonistic and Kantian agenda which seeks to preserve the cultural prestige of intersubjective reason against calls for its replacement by mythical forms of understanding particular to a people's historically-conditioned self-conception. It may therefore be hoped that further comparative study of their respective final works shall shed further light upon Husserl's and Cassirer's affinities as successors to an enlightenment tradition, the value and ideals of which they are equally concerned to defend at a time of profound cultural crisis.

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Elements of the Foundation of the Humanities (*Geisteswissenschaft*) in Husserl's Work

DIETER LOHMAR

Abstract: In his *Ideas I* and *Ideas II* Husserl strives for a phenomenological foundation for the humanities in developing a core hermeneutics. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce some of the new starting points that should contribute to the grounding of the humanities: (1) the conceptual reorientation in *Ideas I* (1913), especially the new conception of intentionality as *noema* entailing the full cultural sense of an object, (2) the idea of an eidetics of the mind as the *a priori* foundation of the humanities in general. This leads further to the project of a phenomenological humanities. In developing this idea Husserl already registers an unexpected (3) problematic antagonism between transcendental reduction and research in the humanities. Finally, I briefly discuss (4) one starting point of phenomenological hermeneutics in bodily understanding in *Ideas II*.

Keywords: Foundations of the Humanities, Phenomenological Foundation of the Humanities, Phenomenological Humanities, Phenomenological Hermeneutics, Bodily Understanding, Transcendental Reduction

Husserl's efforts towards a phenomenological foundation of the humanities have hardly been noticed so far, even though, according to his own testimony, he invested as much effort for this as hardly for any other of his fields of interest. The reason for this is simply the lack of information and the inaccessibility of important texts in which the problems of the communal constitution of a culturally shaped environment were dealt with: namely, the original manuscripts of *Ideas II* (1912–1915). Much of the manuscripts that Husserl had written for the second volume of *Ideas*

for a *Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* were edited by Edith Stein, and they were later published as volumes IV and V in the critical edition *Husserliana*, but Stein's editing was not what Husserl had intended, either in form or content.¹ That *Ideas II*, which Husserl had actually written, remained unknown for so long is certainly one reason for the mistaken impression that phenomenological claims regarding questions of hermeneutics all trace back to Heidegger and – following him – to Gadamer.

I think it is time to tell a completely different story. For there is ample evidence that Husserl invested a great deal of time and energy in the project of a phenomenological foundation of the humanities, and that he also took quite unique paths for its realization. His first attempts in the field of hermeneutics concern mainly elemental and originary foundations of the constitution of a cultural environment. They are originary in several respects, because they deal with cultural senses of simple and everyday objects, e.g., their communally constituted value. In this context, the nature of communal constitution is initially deliberately limited to basic, few and elementary modes of communication (bodily communication, gestures, facial expressions, action, etc.) and few participants. The level of symbolically (linguistically) mediated communication is temporarily postponed and the communal constitution therefore does not yet reach the level of the artful interpretation of texts, works of art and other higher-level intellectual products.²

¹ This is clearly evident from Husserl's astonished and dismissive marginal comments on Landgrebe's copy of Stein's elaborations, e.g., "Presentation useless, throughout the page." (M III 1 I 4/16); "Where is this from?" (ibid., 113); "Surely this is not a transition [...]. What's the point of this whole §, all this doesn't belong here" (ibid., 123); "That probably doesn't belong here" (ibid., 140); "That is probably not a sufficient elaboration" (ibid., 150); "All this [is] insufficient" (ibid., 153); and, in the same tenor, M III 1 I 5/45, 67, 75, 83, 88, 154. There are isolated requests that are still addressed directly to Stein (e.g., Ms. M III 1 I 4/112: "Miss Stein, my sentences read: [...]"), but predominantly they are editorial instructions that probably fall into the time of Landgrebe's transcription (e.g., Ms. M III 1 I 5/ 75: "From Miss Stein and questionable"; "So far my sheet. Where [does] the rest come from?" (ibid., 88); as well as ibid., 45, 67, 83, 154, and elsewhere.). I thank the director of the Husserl Archives Leuven, Prof. Dr. Julia Jansen for permission to quote from unpublished manuscripts. I would also like to mention the kind help of the editors, Prof. Dr. Thiemo Breyer for the translation and Marco Cavallaro for his work on the text.

² The concentration on low-level media of communication and such products of communal constitution is also reflected in the curious fact that in *Ideas I* humans are almost always mentioned together with animals. Language as a medium of communication is not

In terms of content, the project of *Ideas* (I and II) already is an exploration of this subject area, which had been largely untapped by Husserl until then: research of the humanities itself, the attempt to lay its foundation in his eidetic and transcendental phenomenology, and the establishment of the personalistic attitude as opposed to the naturalistic one. The impetus for this goes back to Husserl's personal encounter with Wilhelm Dilthey in the winter of 1905/06.³ Husserl writes in 1927:

The fact that Dilthey identified my phenomenology with the psychology of the humanities and related it to his life's goal of a philosophical foundation of the humanities made a tremendous impression on me. I immediately announced exercises on "Natural Sciences and the Humanities" in Göttingen, and from then on, the related problems of a phenomenology of the humanities occupied me for years almost more than all others, although nothing of it has been published so far. The II. part of the "Ideas," drafted in the winter of 1912 at the same time as the I. part, already treated these problems very broadly. (Husserl 1994, 460)⁴

Why are we still not aware of the fruits of these efforts today? The answer is simple: Edith Stein's editing of *Ideas II* took place during her time as Husserl's assistant, and it marginalizes many contributions to phenomenological humanities.⁵ In this

in the focus from the beginning when talking about understanding: "Animals, including humans, are also immediately there for me; I look at them, I see them, I hear them approaching, I grasp them by the hand; speaking with them, I immediately understand what they are imagining and thinking, what sorts of feelings are stirring in them, what they wish or want." (Husserl 2014, 48; see also *ibid.*, 50, 68, 99ff., 137, and elsewhere) Animal communities are also included in this line of inquiry (cf. Hua III/1, 304).

³ The essential information about the importance that the encounter with Dilthey had for Husserl emerges from a letter by Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke from December 26, 1927 (Husserl 1994, 456–463), from which the following quotations are also taken.

⁴ The supposedly offhand title *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* therefore possibly alludes to Dilthey's *Ideas for a Descriptive and Dissecting Psychology* (*Ideen zu einer beschreibenden und zergliedernden Psychologie*) from 1894. At this point I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Jagna Brudzińska for some helpful remarks.

⁵ A new edition of *Ideas II* is being edited by Dr. Dirk Fonfara at the Husserl Archives Cologne and will soon be published as *Husserliana* IV/V (in the following quoted as Hua IV/V). It will replace the old edition in Hua IV and Hua V. At the moment it is still

chapter, I can only briefly introduce three of the new starting points that should contribute to the grounding of the humanities: (1) the conceptual reorientation in *Ideas I* (1913), (2) the idea of an eidetics of the mind as the a priori foundation of the humanities. Thereby we already encounter an unexpected (3) problematic antagonism between transcendental reduction and research in the humanities in the overall project of the *Ideas*. Finally, I briefly discuss (4) the starting point of bodily understanding in *Ideas II*.

1 Contributions to the Foundation of the Humanities in *Ideas I*

Once one has become aware of the project of a foundation of the humanities, other sources come into view that have not been considered so far. Already in the introduction of *Ideas I*, the intention is indicated to treat the contributions of phenomenology to the foundation of the humanities in the second volume (cf. Husserl 2014, 6, 9f., 34 and *passim*). This concerns a foundation by eidetic laws in particular (cf. *ibid.*, 59f. and *passim*). Empathy with persons in my everyday environment is used extensively in *Ideas I* as a basis for phenomenological analysis, which is fraught with difficulties but still has its justification.⁶

Husserl emphasizes that “essential possibilities of producing such an agreement [...] in principle” exist, so that as a correlate of this intersubjective constitution a “unified world of minds” results (cf. Husserl 2014, 87f. and *passim*). His aim is to analyze comprehensively the objects of culture as “new kinds of objects of a higher order” and thus also “every kind of *object of value* and *practical object*, as well as all the concrete creations of culture that determine our current life as hard actualities, such as, for example, *state, law, custom, church*, and so forth” (*ibid.*, 305; emphasis in the original).⁷ Thus, already in the first volume of the *Ideas* it is a matter of un-

in preparation, I quote according to the page numbers of the first proofs (but they are probably reliable).

⁶ This applies equally to memory, expectation, and imagination (see Husserl 2014, 66ff., 87f.); as already in the lectures on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* of 1910 (Husserl 2006).

⁷ This intention of Husserl had already been emphasized by Dietrich Mahnke (1927). See Husserl’s letter to Mahnke from December 26, 1927 (Husserl 1994, 456–463).

derstanding the objects towards which our consciousness is directed in everyday life (and in the sciences) as culturally shaped elements of an always already communal cultural environment and not only as mere spatiotemporal things which are then – depending on contingent experience – additionally evaluated.

That this is the case can be seen from a fact that it has always been a stumbling block for any reader of the *Ideas*: Why is a wholly new terminology, that of noesis and noema, introduced in 1913? This terminology in part clearly takes up themes of the *Logical Investigations*: the structural elements of the intentional act, matter, positing quality and fullness, apperception and apperceived content, mode of apperception, and so on. What is new is the consideration of the correlation of the acts with the constituted objects. Nevertheless, one wonders whether this would not have been possible already with the concepts of the *Logical Investigations*. In any case, the reasons for this completely new terminology are unfortunately not given in *Ideas I* with desirable clarity. Only in a few places it becomes halfway clear what Husserl actually intends with it: the noema can be seen as the transposition of the concept of meaning to all acts directed toward things of a culturally shaped environment.⁸ This means: things are not only spatiotemporally extended elements of nature, which are independent of all interpretations and valuations of a sense-giving and sense-creating community. But: the full sense of a thing is always and already upon the very first perception, co-determined by cultural (regional) senses and norms, which originate from a communicating community.

In this new conception of what was called the intentional object in the *Logical Investigations* lies the motive for the introduction of the new terminology of the noema. Just as meanings are assigned to word sounds or written utterances by a community that supervises the use of this system of signs and persists in mutual corrections as a structure of meaning, so cultural senses are assigned to things by a community. And just as we have to learn the rules of word use and meaning, we also have to learn the value and rules for the use of a thing in the communicative nexus of our community.

⁸ “The noema in general, however, is nothing more than the generalization of the idea of meaning to the whole field of acts.” (Hua IV/V, 154) See also the explanations in the *Lectures on the Theory of Meaning* (Husserl 1987, 34ff.). This intention can also be found in § 124 of *Ideas I*. Cf. Grünewald (2009) for a more extensive use of the term noema in the field of the humanities.

Arguing in this way, Husserl breaks with the meager concept of object, which he preferred in the *Logical Investigations*: i.e., the spatiotemporal thing, which appears identical for and is meant equally by all subjects. To this thing, according to the *Logical Investigations*, new senses like values and rules can be added – depending on a corresponding experience. The initial object, however, is an artificial abstraction from the thing that we mean in our living exchange with others in the everyday life of our community: here things always already have value and they are apprehended with rules for their use. As adults, we need to know all these supplements of meaning, and we also need to imagine them as connected to the thing.

How do we recognize this? Any everyday object can serve as an example here: a finely crafted cup is held in high esteem as valuable, as beautiful, as a dignified artifact; we know that we should not hammer nails into the wall with it. Here the learned rules for the use of a thing become apparent, which also prevent us from using a sacred object (e.g., a crucifix) that is robust in terms of material for the same purpose. And this is not only true for highly valued things of our environment. Processed wood already appears in perception as a building material or building aid, and if it can no longer be used for this purpose, it may appear as a heating source or as an organic recyclable material, etc.⁹ Juridical rules such as property form another area of illustrations.

All this is self-evident for us as communal beings, but nevertheless we may and must ask from where we receive all this knowledge about value and the rules of use (which can be different from community to community). How do the values and norms get ‘to’ these things at all, since they are not sensorially given? Here we can see the considerable expansion of the field of observation indicated by the terminology of the noema: we do not merely perceive spatiotemporal things, but already their perception is – just as in the perception of the words of language – always already a meaning-bestowing act within the framework of the rules of our community. In apperception we add to what is presented by the sensory impressions not only the co-imagined backside of the object, but also values and norms for its use. We assign meanings to things. And in these significations, we conform to the standards of our community: we see a cow as a sentient animal being, there are

⁹ Husserl also refers to coal as a heating material for this purpose (see Hua IV/V, 191, 238).

certain minimal rules for its use, but we do not regard it as sacred. Other communities instead demand this addition of meaning.

We learned these rules of meaning-bestowing from other members of the community, and this learning occurred by communicative influence on us. We have willingly submitted to this lesson, however, because these are the standards of our community, and ignorance and non-observance of these standards would be embarrassing to us. It would reveal our intellectual or moral immaturity. For this simple reason, we learn these standards easily and voluntarily, for in this way we become adults, that is, fully valid members of our own community, whose recognition we strive to achieve.

The subject thematized in the new phenomenological humanities lives in a personal community and, like anyone else, is related to our common world, our cultural environment. The understanding and understood person lives in a personal union with a common cultural environment. Their intentional references thus always already pertain to objects that already carry cultural meanings, e.g., the values and rules recognized within the community. Things and events of the environment already have a value accepted by the community, there are rules for their use or there is a mode of application determined by a tradition of work (hammer, butter churn, etc.).¹⁰

There is no physical causality for these 'irreal' but nevertheless 'effective' cultural senses attached to the objects of our everyday world. The factor that Husserl calls motivation is at work in a person's cultural environment. For example, a thing exerts a stimulus on me, it gently arouses my interest – but not by a glaring excitement that captures my senses. It initiates in me “a tendency to turn towards it” (Hua IV/V, 546). For example, an object may be pleasing, i.e., it motivates me to move my eyes toward it or away from it. This, too, cannot simply be called physics or physiology, rather it is a motivated, valued, and bodily experienced and at the

¹⁰ Thus, the simple things of everyday life appear to depend on a high-level intersubjective constitution, and yet the reference to these things remains plain and natural in one important respect, namely because it is not determined by an artificial abstraction or by a preceding reinterpretation. Such a reinterpretation would be present, for instance, in the artificial abstraction of naturalization, on the one hand, and in transcendental reduction, on the other hand, both of which are to be avoided. In another respect, however, the intention towards objects, actions, and events of the environment is never simple, because the cultural elements of meaning attached to things or events are high-level and achievements of a communal constitution.

same time evaluatively felt occurrence. I thereby move within a horizon of possible motivated and simultaneously free movements. The object tempts me, for example, to explore it more closely, but I do not have to follow the stimulus. My motives are based on evaluated characteristics and previous experience with this object or a similar one, nevertheless they are not compelling.

The motivational stimulus, however, can also have a practical effect. A piece of food can entice me to enjoy it and so I follow the inclination, but I can also ignore it and strive for the realization of ideal goals, and so on. In a cultural environment, every thing and every event has a value and is designated for a possible use: “I value it as a means to ends” (ibid., 547) or even as a work of art. The qualities of works, goods, uses, and values that come into play here are not only determined by myself, they are also experienced by others, for they are communal qualities. I grasp something as food, as fuel, as a device, as a tool, and so on. It can seem to me as though the thing “invites” me, as it were, to act with it (ibid.).¹¹ If it is mere raw material, for example, it might excite me to reshape it. And it need not be real things that excite me, it can also be unreal and even ‘illusionary objects’ that have the same character, e.g., the attraction of the beauty of a thing or a person. But everything remains within the framework of everyday experience: even the bad air in the room irritates me. I want to go for a walk or air out the room.¹²

¹¹ The expression that a thing ‘affords’ me to do something with it should be understood metaphorically. What is meant is an experienced motivation, an experienced tendency or felt inclination to do or not to do something. This tendency is also characterized in a bodily manner, because it is specific to my limbs and it motivates me to make movements that correspond to the goal: I move my head or my eyes to see something or to see further, I move my hand when I want to grasp something. I can push, pull, shove or simply resist with my hand or another limb, etc. (see Hua IV/V, 548). In doing so, the limbs of my body prove to be organs of my tendencies, which take effect in involuntary actions, and organs of my free will, as in planned actions.

¹² This description shows a certain parallelism to the description at the beginning of *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl 1973, §§ 15ff.): here, too, the description assumes that a thing “attracts” me, and in fact “invites me to devote” myself to it. – One tends at this point, where it is still a matter of the pre-predicative low-level attention to objects, to assume a sensory stimulus alone. The examples used (the whistle of the locomotive, noise on the street, etc.) also speak at first rather for a purely sensory stimulus, but the account here shows (see Hua IV/V, 546ff.) that the appeal can also already be a practical seeming: the handle of a tool prompts me to touch it in the right way, a signal has a conventionally established meaning, and so on.

The objects of my cultural environment are thus not simply elements of the spatiotemporal world. These things are – although they do not necessarily have to be material – all ‘real’ in the sense of being effective, i.e., on the one hand they affect each other in the sense of everyday causality, but furthermore they can also motivate us. The intentional relation to a thing in my environment is always already evaluative and practical.¹³

In this important respect, the view of the *Ideas*, which is directed to the cultural senses of things, extends the conception of the intentional act found in the *Logical Investigations*. There, spatiotemporal things appeared to everybody in the same way; in the *Ideas*, moreover, they all carry different meanings depending on the particular community. This is the justification of the new terminology of the noema.

2 A priori Foundation of the Natural Sciences and the Humanities

In the lecture *Introduction to Phenomenology* from the summer semester of 1912, in the *Logos* article, and in *Ideas I*, the eidetic a priori foundation of the humanities that Husserl seeks is called ‘nomological.’ This seems to indicate two demarcations. On the one hand, Husserl does not want to follow the distinction between natural sciences and humanities advocated by Wilhelm Windelband with the juxtaposition of *nomothetic* (i.e., establishing laws for the natural sciences) and *ideographic* (i.e., recording individual events) methodologies.¹⁴ Husserl, on the contrary, holds that there are general laws in the humanities as well, which derive from an eidetic a priori core. He further holds that this core, which he calls an eidetics of the mind, functions as foundation for the humanities in an analogous way as mathematics does for physics.

¹³ Here, an important difference to the conception of intentionality in the *Fifth Logical Investigation* is already evident, where Husserl, in order to avoid an obvious misinterpretation of act-intentionality as a possibly practically directed reference to action, explicitly says that no practice is meant here: “*all thought of activity must be rigidly excluded*” (Husserl 2001, 102; emphasis in the original).

¹⁴ See Windelband’s lecture *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft* from 1894 (published in Windelband 1904).

On the other hand, he distances himself from Wilhelm Dilthey, who, in Husserl's view, concentrated too much on the idiographic, i.e., the individual and for each case unique aspect of the person and the experience currently being had, and did not want to take advantage of the opportunities offered by a law-like (nomological) approach. At any rate, this is Husserl's critique in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* from 1911 (Husserl 2002), and in the lecture given in the summer semester of 1912 he continues this line of reasoning by establishing the idea of a nomological science of the mind.

In the lecture of the summer semester 1912, which has already been mentioned several times, Husserl deals extensively with the foundational relationship between empirical and eidetic sciences. In general, each object of empirical sciences belongs to a material region, in the natural sciences it is the spatiotemporally determined thing for whose material region there exist eidetic laws. The eidetic laws in this case are those of geometry and arithmetic. Husserl refers to Kant, who treated the relation of mathematics and physics under the heading of a pure and an applied natural science (see Kant 2004). Looking back historically, Husserl shows that the development of fruitful lines of research and also whole sciences depend on the establishment of the eidetic disciplines applicable to such a region in each case.

The interaction of pure and empirical disciplines is sometimes very close, so that one may speak of cross-fertilization. Occasionally, concrete empirical research pursues questions for the solution of which new mathematical methods must first be devised. In this case, eidetic science reacts to and, so to speak, fulfills the demands of empirical science by working out new theories.¹⁵ The a priori theories are worked out in each case in eidetic purity, meaning they apply to the objects of a material region but they are not based on empirical findings. Here it becomes evident that the formation of empirical science depends on the formation

¹⁵ The astonishing simultaneous invention of the integral and differential calculus by Newton and Leibniz can serve as an example for demands coming from empirical research and sometimes also from the need for a technical implementation of inventions. Both responded to a contemporary desideratum of empirical research: one needed to be able to calculate surfaces which are curvilinearly bounded by functions and also to calculate exactly the gradient in an empirically found value function. But there is also the reverse case, in which the elaboration of alternative geometries, e.g., with metrics changing from point to point, makes it possible to formulate relativistic physics.

of the associated eidetic discipline. With regard to empirical psychology, Husserl intensifies his reflections and calls for an eidetics of the mind as the basis of an empirical psychology ‘that will be able to come forward as science’ (Kant 2004). Such an eidetics formulates laws that can serve as an eidetic basis for psychology. It is only by means of these laws that psychology becomes a science, only through them nomological explanations are possible.

Husserl’s phenomenology is presented in the lecture *Introduction to Phenomenology* from the summer of 1912 as the desired, eidetic foundational science of the mind (see Hua Mat X, 62ff.).¹⁶ Eidetic phenomenology serves as a foundational science not only for psychology, but for all sciences that have the mind and mental products as their subject: psychology, sociology, history, and so on (see *ibid.*, 66f.). Only with an eidetics of the mind can we arrive at ‘humanities explaining on the basis of nomological theories.’ Eidetic phenomenology is to assume the same function for the humanities that mathematics has for applied physics. Looking at the 19th century efforts to ground the humanities in natural science, Husserl notes that they failed. “The epoch of nomological explanatory psychology, and of the humanities in general, has not yet begun” (*ibid.*, 66), because the task of a phenomenological eidetics of the mind has not yet been grasped (see *ibid.*, 71).¹⁷ Moreover, the task of the eidetics of the mind is more multifaceted than the eidetics of nature, which is the basis of physics (see *ibid.*, 72).¹⁸

In *Ideas I* (1913), too, Husserl emphasizes that there is and can be no science of facts “that, *fully developed as a science*, could be pure of forms of eidetic knowledge and thus *could be independent of eidetic sciences, whether they be formal or material*” (Husserl 2014, 20; emphasis in original).¹⁹ However, this thesis, if one refers it only to the formal a priori, can also be merely about the fact that a science, as a system of interconnected propositions, must obey the rules of formal logic, e.g.,

¹⁶ This lecture will be published as *Husserliana Materialien X*. In the following I refer to these lecture as Hua Mat X. I quote according to a preliminary (but probably already reliable) page numbering.

¹⁷ “All the great efforts of eminent men to reform psychology and the humanities in general, on the model of exact natural science, to give it the stage of development of ‘exact’ science, have failed.” (Hua Mat X, 69)

¹⁸ Husserl refers here to his article *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* (Husserl 2002).

¹⁹ “*Every science of facts (science of experience) has essential, theoretical foundations in eidetic ontologies.*” (Husserl 2014, 20; emphasis in original)

that it must be free of contradictions. Thus, the actual fruitful core of the thesis must refer to material eidetic ontologies. While the foundation of the natural sciences depends on the ontology of nature as geometry and eidetics of extended objects (see *ibid.*, § 10), psychology and the other humanities disciplines can really benefit only from a differentiated material eidetics of the mind.²⁰ The involvement of *Ideas I* in the new project of phenomenological humanities is not only evident with regard to the eidetics of the mind. The inclusion of understanding, i.e., empathy with others as an equal field of experience, also reflects this new direction of interest.

We even find in § 60 of *Ideas I* the introduction of a “reduction specific to the humanities.” However, this reduction stands in the context of the transcendental reduction and a whole series of further special reductions, each of which contours and initiates individual problems of constitutional research (in §§ 56–61 of *Ideas I*). Here, the “suspension of all natural sciences and humanities” is also found, and this includes

[...] every kind of cultural form, works of the technical arts and the fine arts, of the sciences (to the extent that they come into question, not as valid unities but just as cultural *facta*), and aesthetic and practical values of every shape. The same holds naturally, too, for other kinds of actualities such as the state, customs, law, religion. (Husserl 2014, 104)

However – with regard to the methodological function of reductions in Husserl’s phenomenology (see on this Lohmar 2002) – this ‘humanistic’ reduction is only a first step on the path of a constitutional analysis of communal constitution.

The analysis of the special kind of intuitive givenness of cultural objects and cultural senses of everyday objects requires an inquiry into the communal and communicative foundation and transformation of such specifically cultural senses. Such an analysis is only announced here and made possible by new concepts (noema) and methods, but it shall only be carried out in *Ideas II* (see Husserl 2014,

²⁰ It must be noted, however, that this project was only realized to a small extent in 1912/13. The new *Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* was supposed to advance the elaboration of these regional eidetics by distributing them among different scholars, each with specialized responsibilities.

§§ 152f.). Only the investigation of the different forms of communication in a community, of mutual correction, mutual understanding, etc., and finally of the processes by which agreement can be reached, problematized, modified and again newly founded, can contribute to the elucidation of the mode of givenness of cultural senses.

3 A Problematic Antagonism between Transcendental Reduction and Research in the Humanities

One should, however, be aware of a virulent tension in the methods used here. Already in *Ideas I*, Husserl rather casually points out that the humanities are sciences that “require the natural attitude” (Husserl 2014, 104). Thus, on the one hand, *Ideas I* recommend transcendental reduction as a universal method consisting in pointing out and temporarily suspending a claim to validity. Indeed, it concerns not only our everyday relation to the world, but also the natural sciences and all of the humanities (see *ibid.*, 87f., 110). In *Ideas I*, Husserl does not yet see a problem in this (see *ibid.*, 136f.). On the other hand, the radical transcendental reduction is an intervening method that would severely disturb the constitutive life in a community – in fact, it would prevent it altogether. Communal constitution presupposes that everything to which we and others refer to is ‘real’ and ‘valid’ for us. Without this affirmative presupposition, the discussion and the mixture of beliefs (sometimes unfounded or erroneous, of course), the reconciliation of values and norms, etc., in living communication would not work. The constitutive structure of communal beliefs would thus remain without a concrete understanding.

Husserl already notes this difficulty in the second volume of *Ideas*: the transcendental reduction, which seemingly has to be presupposed for all phenomenological analyses, turns out to be rather a hindrance for investigations in the humanities. The interacting beliefs can, of course, always be unfounded, ill-guided or based on mere hearsay, but nevertheless they can only interact as ‘real’ and as ‘validly believed’ in the common constitution of values, for instance.

This argument becomes clear in the detailed “Thematic Elaboration No. 18” of *Ideas II*. Husserl points out that the subject of the humanities is “personal

subjectivity in relation to its environment” (Hua IV/V, 570–574). Since persons live with the natural attitude, everything they – and the community – consider valuable, valid, and existing belongs to the field of legitimate inquiry: things, values, goods, art, natural beauty, literature, religion, etc. Even if the cultural environment is considered within the framework of phenomenological methodology, this humanistic phenomenology based on experience cannot be a transcendental one: “The humanist does not need a transcendental phenomenological reduction to the phenomena of phenomenology” (Hua IV/V, 571). There shall be no artificial abstractions in phenomenological humanities: “The humanist needs to eliminate nothing in artificial methodology from this sphere.” (Ibid.) However, the mutual exclusion of research in the humanities and the phenomenological reduction (as elimination of the natural attitude) is already announced in some formulations of *Ideas I*: “Thus, precisely as sciences that require the natural attitude, *all the sciences of nature and of the mind*, together with the entire stock of knowledge in them, *fall prey to the suspension*.” (Husserl 2014, 104; emphasis in the original) Shortly after the first public announcement of the transcendental reduction in *Ideas I*, Husserl has to realize that this method is not at all useful for an important new sub-discipline of phenomenology, that it stands in the way of its success in principle. *Ideas I* propagate the transcendental reduction, *Ideas II* take it back again, but only with regard to the new phenomenological humanities that is to be established. This is indeed peculiar and it remained unnoticed for a long time.²¹

4 The Elementary Hermeneutics of Bodily Understanding

In some places of *Ideas I*, empathy with others is placed more or less on an equal footing with the other sources of intuitive givenness, such as sensoriality, memory, expectation, and imagination (see Husserl 2014, 9f., 14, 65f., 87f., and elsewhere).²² However, the intuition of the experience of the other has its peculiarities: “This

²¹ On the ‘remote effects’ of this difficulty, see Lohmar 2020.

²² This expansion of the permissible range of phenomenological analyses already occurs explicitly in the lecture on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* given in the winter semester of 1910/11 (Husserl 2006).

way of empathetically observing is, to be sure, an intuitive act that gives [us something] but no longer an act that does so *in an originary way*" (ibid., 10). Empathy with others is about their individual feelings, values and volitions, which, however, have always already absorbed the values and goals of the community (see ibid., 304).

But even in *Ideas II* these analyses have in many respects only been resolutely begun, but often not yet led to a final result. Nevertheless, Husserl shows that he by no means wants to treat many questions in the same way as other contemporary attempts. One of the outstanding approaches concerns understanding, which, however, does not begin at the constitutional level of the linguistic, symbolically mediated, but deeper, with bodily understanding. In comparison with the symbolically mediated approach, the other approaches of hermeneutics actually already start at a level that is too high, e.g., with actions in a biographical, political or social context (Dilthey) or with linguistic explanations that require a settling into the use of language and information about the historical reality of the source (Schleiermacher) and also with symbols (Cassirer). High-level starting points with symbolic communication, in fact, have a weakness: with them, one must already assume an established, communally regulated method of communicating with symbols, i.e., communally accepted rules for the use of the linguistic symbols. For the establishment of such rules, we would have to presuppose again already successfully developed processes of understanding and agreement, and indeed these must be established before and independently of the symbolic level. Bodily understanding, which is largely independent of symbolic performance, begins at this very basic stratum of the whole complex of possibilities of understanding.

In bodily understanding, the crucial starting point and medium of our empathy is the body of the other, but also my own. Husserl writes: "The other's body is a gateway (in 'expression,' in indication, etc.) for the understanding of the I there, the 'he' moves his hand, he reaches for this or that, he thinks, he is motivated by this and that." (Hua IV/V, 550) The foreign body is apperceived on the one hand as a physical body like other objects, but – going beyond that – also as a "carrier of sensibilities" (ibid., also as a carrier of sensations, ibid., 22, 25, 36, and elsewhere). The sensations arise, so to speak, through influences 'from outside' on the body of the other. But the body of the other is at the same time the 'organon of a subject,' i.e., the body and its expression is also apperceived as a tool of his action. I am turned towards the body of the other in perception, and thus also towards him as

a body, but in my empathic acts I direct myself precisely not to the purely physical side of his body. My empathic, understanding acts are directed towards something that I cannot see sensorially, i.e., his I, his feeling, willing and thinking etc. This way of access is the only one that is possible for us. We have no ‘telepathic,’ direct way to his own experience. Therefore, our empathy is originary – although the intended thing does not exist as the other experiences it, it is nevertheless directed to his ‘real’ experiencing and it is as fulfilled as it can possibly be for us.²³

The body of the other is a universal medium for understanding, which has the function of displaying the experience of ‘the other there,’ namely his feeling, knowing and willing.²⁴ The other subject thus appears to me in apperceptive empathy in his environment, which he and his community hold to be real and true, and this also includes shared beliefs, values, things, etc. Because I live in the same culturally formed environment, I know and therefore understand the web of motivations that are effective for him.

The original medium of understanding in this view is not language, writing or any other symbolic medium of communication, but the direct interaction of humans with each other and the grasping of the motives, feelings and intentions of the other in the original reality of their body. The body of the other is in many respects a true expression of the psychological life of the other. It is at least more truthful than the volitionally controllable communication through actions, facial expressions and linguistic utterances, because blushing, for example, cannot be controlled volitionally.

The bodily mediated understanding has an original character and is essentially mutual, i.e., it is not distanced, scientific, theoretical, mediated by symbols, but it is communicative: one person gives the other something to understand now and here and vice versa. In bodily-based understanding, one affects the other in an interaction, we reciprocally influence each other (see Hua IV/V, 551). The original, bodily understanding with which Husserl’s phenomenological theory of the

²³ One could say here somewhat pointedly: the empathized other is already the real other – in a certain analogy to the formulation in the *Logical Investigations*: “*the intentional object of a presentation is the same as its actual object*” (Husserl 2001, 127; emphasis in the original).

²⁴ “He moves his hand, he reaches for this and that, he pushes, he thinks, he is motivated by this and that, he is in the center of an environment that appears to him, is present to him in memory, is thought-of, etc. environment” (Hua IV/V, 550).

humanities begins is mutual and immediate. It is not transmitted through a symbolic medium.

We might therefore say that through empathy we take other subjects into our “subjective world, our environment” (Hua IV/V, 550) – and the reverse is also true. The fundamental layer of bodily understanding is both mutual and irrevocably communal. Its performances belong to the realm of communal constitution, namely to “joint work, joint research, technical activity, etc.” (ibid., 550f.). In the communally constituted environment, there are shared values, shared plans, shared things, a conception of shared history, etc. The sense of objectivity of all these conceptions therefore arises quite straightforwardly. Even the actions, works and inventions of the individual already bear the stamp of communal constitution. They refer to the shared world.

The persons of a community thus have an effect on each other and this effect also conveys norms. There is a constant and mostly reciprocal, normative influence of the subjects on each other. The individual is motivated by the milieu, i.e., the community in which he lives and understands and agrees with others, as well as recognizes, plans and evaluations. In teaching such norms, the threat of sanctions is always in the background. This need not take place in terms of implied or actual fisticuffs; sometimes even a look constitutes a sanction. If the other person notices that I do not agree with his evaluation, then he looks at me indignantly, for example, but not in the individual mode of anger, but in the communal mode of indignation.²⁵ This sanctioning look is the beginning of an intensifying series of sanctions, which he will confer on me in the name of the community. Already the kind

²⁵ Here an interesting sideline of communication is revealed, namely that by approving, critical or prompting looks, which is characteristic for all species living in groups. This works also in non-linguistic species. In my view, one should in principle avoid designing a theory of communal constitution that starts from the premise of speech as the predominant form of communication, because under this assumption it follows directly that only humans can constitute communally at all. Animals could not be grasped in this way as subjects of communal constitutive performances. However, this is certainly wrong, because we know many cases of animal cultures today. It has also been shown that there are enduring tool traditions among animals, such as the cracking of palm nuts with stones among the chimpanzees of Tai National Park, which has been demonstrated to have existed for 4300 years (Mercader et al. 2007). However, we still have problems recognizing the existence of moral rules in animal species, although the evidence for this is also impressive (see de Waal 1997).

of the look communicates with differentiation whether it is an individual person who wishes something or does not wish something or whether it is the community that does so. The messages then become even more emphatic on a symbolic or linguistic basis, but here, too, a bodily element of communication contributes to the meaning: the tone of the message tells whether a wish is individual or corresponds to a communal norm. If it is kept neutral-objective and already speaks in the tone of 'one does not do this,' then it is a norm of the community. And even in the case of a physical rebuke, this difference becomes apparent: there is the angry and powerful nudge, which makes it clear to the other person that his action affects my interests, and a nudge that contains an objective, still friendly rebuke as a reference to community norms. If I am only hindered by adhering to an action, but not angrily thrashed, then this action only communicates a norm, and so on.

These low-level forms of bodily communication demonstrate that there can be communal constitution of cultural senses even before and without language. We must now ask ourselves what the utility of such an approach to bodily understanding is: is Husserl only concerned with breaking down the very complex problem of understanding into manageable simpler tasks? If so, the next step would be to gradually add other, e.g., gestural, symbolic, linguistic and written media of communication, so that the contribution of historical generations to the constitution of the complete sense can be appreciated. This is one of the systematically possible further developments of Husserl's hermeneutics, to which I can only allude here. But he is also concerned with the fundamental function of bodily communication, which is quite capable of conveying very profound cultural senses.

Before we fully enter the level of linguistic understanding, I would like to point out some unnoticed and at the same time astonishing advantages of the bodily mediation of cultural senses. There are, in fact, many deep-seated cultural senses that largely defy determination at the symbolic level. A concept in a dictionary always leads us only to other concepts, and the character of these discursive (*discurrere*) concepts is that symbols and concepts are always explained by new concepts. It is therefore intuition, and only intuition, that can tell us what they really mean. There are, however, high-level cultural senses for which this approach to intuition is obstructed, because they have their basis of meaning in a network of cultural conceptions, e.g., religion. Here, bodily understanding turns out to be one of the original sources of meaning and thus a fundamental dimension of experience for communal senses.

As an example, I would like to mention the sublime in the sacred form of the holy. The difficulty of a purely discursive mediation of this cultural sense through the use of other terms, e.g., supremely good, very important, uplifting, godly, awe-inspiring, etc., is obvious. The attempt is about as futile as if we wanted to explain the meaning of 'red' or 'yellow' to a colorblind person. That is, the mediation of the meaning cannot be carried out here without fulfilling intuition, but it can hardly be indicated which kind this is.

Therefore, even in the case of the sacred, we should look for intuitive givenness. We occasionally say: it fills us with shudder, it makes us fall silent, we look up to it, it hovers high above us, it fills our chest with pride. When we, as phenomenologists, hear such bodily metaphors, we should take them as indicators of the bodily mediation of such cultural senses and try to pursue this kind of mediation. For the problem of communicating the sense of the sacred to others in a comprehensible and accessible way is almost insoluble on the discursive-conceptual level: we explain one concept by another and thus never arrive at a perception that alone can give us the sense of that designation. If, on the other hand, we ask how children 'learn' what the meaning of these words is, we are referred to the immediate bodily interaction between parent and child. The shuddering, the being moved, the silencing, the freezing of the parents in the face of the sacred or sublime is precisely the way in which the sense of the sublime is conveyed through involuntary bodily expression. And of course, at the same time, these senses are transported in association with norms that apply in our community, e.g.: here and now one must not run around (the others are already looking), but one must remain silent and in adoration, and shudder in the same way as one has perceived it bodily from one's parents. What is felt in such encounters is transported, because the awe before the sublime also communicates itself to the child in a direct bodily manner. It shudders with them, it fears with them, because it willingly absorbs the norms of the adults into its own behavior.

From the immediate, bodily communication we arrive at symbolically mediated communication and thus also at indirect forms of understanding, e.g., of traditions, written testimonies, archaeological findings, etc. If, in understanding, we interpret the symbols as we have learned them from others, and if, in expressing them, we consciously observe the correct use of language, we arrive at an understanding of "their works or the tradition" in an "indirect way" (Hua IV/V, 551). The prerequisite for a successful understanding of symbolically mediated,

spiritual meaning, for example, is that we first become familiar with the everyday life, the use of language, and the imaginary world of the historical source. Only then would we arrive at what Schleiermacher means by skillful, methodically guided, ‘historically’ and ‘psychologically’ informed understanding (see on this Schleiermacher 1977).²⁶

Translated from the German by Thiemo Breyer

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²⁶ On the other hand, Husserl’s treatment of the questions of cultural understanding across temporal and regional boundaries also reveals limitations of the original, bodily-based layer of understanding. Husserl does not address the many material works that make such mediated and methodologically directed understanding possible in the first place: excavations, linguistic research, cultural comparison, etc.

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Ideality – A Missing Link Between the Philosophies of the Arts of Ernst Cassirer and Edmund Husserl?

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Abstract: The philosophies of Ernst Cassirer and Edmund Husserl are examined with particular respect to the philosophy of the arts. While Cassirer's critical idealism of the arts, in *Freiheit und Form* from 1918 and most notably in his two late books *The Logic of the Humanities* and *An Essay on Man*, depends on a concept of ideality that evolves from a concept of the ideal world with application of Moses Mendelssohn's distinction of the two kinds of the natural and the arbitrary signs of arts, Husserl's transcendental idealism of the arts, in *Formale und transzendente Logik* and its short but crucial § 2, departs from the fact that the ideality of the 'linguistic' encompasses the ideality of textual signs as well as the reproduction of non-textual visual or primarily audible signs. These two philosophical, *au fond* semiotic positions of earlier 20th century are shown as enriched by their philosophies of art in general and by their exemplary contexts drawing on further writings of both of them which revolve around the ideal and the ideality. Taking account of the fundamental role of language both in Cassirer and Husserl a quick glance is taken at Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*. For the final, instead of a systematic comparison or conclusion, a possible common root of Cassirer's and Husserl's critical and transcendental idealisms of the arts is suggested with a hint at Kant's philosophy, its historical followers and its focus on a treatment of ideality that sheds a ray on the arts of the novel and of the sketch flashing in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Keywords: Arts, Ideality, Semiotics, Cassirer, Husserl, Kant

Edmund Husserl and Ernst Cassirer, half a generation apart, are the most important exponents of phenomenology and neo-Kantianism still read today. Yet phenomenology and neo-Kantianism are among the most important currents in philosophy of the (late 19th and) 20th century, which have diverged and to this day openly, or sometimes more tacitly, relate to each other. In doing so, they broadly measure through the fields of philosophy, which also include the field of philosophy of art as well as the philosophy of the arts. What do their philosophies of the arts look like? And are there connections in this field between their idealism, which is critical on the one hand and transcendental on the other?

1 Cassirer's Philosophy of the Arts and its Position on Ideality

Compelled to face the challenges of forced emigration in the last decade of his life, Ernst Cassirer was nonetheless able to write two monographs. They constitute the sum of his philosophy and for the first time in his work contain outlines of his own philosophy of art. We are talking about *The Logic of the Humanities: Five Studies* from 1942 and *An Essay on Man* from 1944.

1.1 The Ideality of Art and the Ideal World

An important topic of these two books is ideality.¹ Cassirer refers to it in the *Five Studies* vis-à-vis imitation theories of art. His argument goes as follows: If art

¹ By ideality I understand idea-ness or idea-adequacy, one could also introduce the term 'idea-ity.' It is true that one would have to speak more precisely of the 'being-of-that-which-is-ideal.' This would require ontological investigations. For the moment it is sufficient to lean on Kant. Unlike categories or concepts of understanding, ideas or concepts of reason transcend the area of (natural) scientific knowledge. But it makes sense to speak of a similarity of ideas, in Kant's case, of space and time, both of which forms of intuition lie outside the area of reason and are even prior to the area of understanding and its phenomena. Thus, Kant calls his philosophical doctrine in view of that "ideality of outer appearances [...] *idealism*" (Kant 1998, A367). In this variety of

merely repeated an “external fact or an inner event,” one would have to “deny it any measure of ‘ideal significance’” (Cassirer 1961, 83). Yet, true ideality, the ideality of “theoretical concepts [of the sciences, P. M.]” as well as that of the “intuitive formation [of the arts, P. M.],” always “entails a productive, rather than a merely receptive or imitative” behavior (*ibid.*). That is, as in “any other [...] species of art” (*ibid.*, 84), it is a matter of “that kind of ‘ideality’ which Johann Wolfgang Goethe described with his words as “the original, the ideal mode of thought, the eternal within the ephemeral” (*ibid.*).²

This marks the topos ‘ideality.’ Again, Cassirer refers, in the *Essay on Man*, chapter “X. History,” to “the ideality of art. Art gives us an ideal description of human life by a sort of alchemistic process; it turns our life into the dynamic of pure forms.” (Cassirer 2006, 221) To this he appends a footnote linking to chapter “IX. Art.” Here, the subject is the “change in the human soul” (*ibid.*, 160) towards a “world of pure sensuous forms,” in which “all our feelings undergo a transsubstantiation” (*ibid.*, 161; cf. Danto 1964, 580).

The ideality of art in the experience of pure, sensuous forms also finds expression in an ideal world. Thus, Cassirer states in the last paragraph of “XII. Summary and Conclusion” that “man discovers and proves a new power – the power to build up a world of his own, an ‘ideal’ world.” (Cassirer 2006, 244)³ This “‘ideal world’ [...] is opened from different sides by religion, art, philosophy, science” (*ibid.*, 47). And when Cassirer translates the saying “To live in the idea is to treat the impossible as if it were possible” (Goethe 1998c, 382) as “To live in the ideal world [...] is to treat the impossible as if it were possible” (Cassirer 2006, 68), he does so because of this world “art [...] gives [...] the intuition of the form of things” (*ibid.*, 156). Cassirer therefore extends Plato’s numerical “ideal world” (*ibid.*, 6 and 234) under the auspices of an anthropology of art: “Schiller [...] did not hesitate to connect the ‘ideal’

ideality as possibility of ideas, ontological account would have to be taken of the normative prescription of the ideal in the root word ‘*idealis*,’ but also of ‘*idealiter*,’ further of “*Ideengemäßheit*” (Kainz 1948, 537–551), of “*Ideität*” and “*Ideellität*” (Spiegelberg 1930, §§ 16ff.), but also of a historical topos like “empty ideality” in romanticism and modernism, as for instance in Baudelaire (Friedrich 1956, 35f.).

² Cassirer indirectly quotes: “*die ideelle Denkweise das Ewige im Vorübergehenden schauen läßt*” (Goethe 1930, 323).

³ Kaufmann (1949, 835) has hinted at this passage in the following way: “Cassirer emphasizes that he deals with the world of man above all in order to pass through it to the being of man.”

world of art with the play of a child because [...] the world of the child had undergone a process of idealization and sublimation.” (Ibid., 179) But the playful-illusive images of a child (ibid., 177) later transform into the artist’s “pure forms”:

The artist plays with *forms*, with lines and designs, rhythms and melodies [...] [for the sake of a] metamorphosis of objects into forms. [...] [T]he artist dissolves the hard stuff of things in the crucible of his imagination, and the result of this process is the discovery of a new world of poetic, musical, or plastic forms. (Ibid., 177f.)

Cassirer was already interested in such a specific ideality of the ideal world thirty years earlier in his programmatic treatise in philosophy of science *Substance and Function*. Here Cassirer (1953, 297) aimed at an ideality of possible symbolic forms by means of abstraction of the “ideality [...] of certain axioms and norms of scientific knowledge.” Via abstracted “images” a “transformation of the content of mere perception into the world of empirical-physical masses and movements” takes place (ibid., 299). Such a “transformation of the concretely sensuous reality” into a new “sensuous multiplicity” corresponds here to “certain theoretical conditions” (ibid., 14). As this already indicates, the transformation of symbolic forms could also correspond to other, for instance artistic conditions. There is no mention of art yet. But the basic idealistic motive becomes clear.

1.2 Mendelssohn’s Characterization: Actuality of the 18th in the 20th Century

For his undoubtedly idealistic-classicist conception of art, Cassirer takes up not only Goethe and Schiller, but also aesthetic theories of the German pre- or early classical period. For the theory of art still dominant in the 18th century the aim was to regulate art as a creative-subjective activity and to commit it to the imitation of objective, beautiful nature. Thus, performing arts and music would have to comply with the demand *ut pictura poesis*: “Poetry is differentiated from painting by the mode and means, but not by the general function of imitation.” (Cassirer 2006, 150) But poetry does not merely imitate. It does not merely describe. Theorists from the mid-18th century onward confront this problem. Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

in his programmatic novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* from 1761, replaces the value of imitation with the value of feeling, and with this “new ideal” revives a corresponding “ideal of ‘characteristic art’” (ibid., 152). Goethe struck the same note in 1772, as Cassirer informs us (ibid., 152f):

Art is formative long before it is beautiful, and yet it is then true and great art, very often truer and greater than beautiful art itself. For man has in him a formative nature, [...] this characteristic art is the only true art. (Goethe 1998b, 13; trans. by Bosanquet 1923, 114)

And Moses Mendelssohn emphasizes the power of characterization in a general theory of the arts, as Cassirer (Cassirer 2001, 86–97) elaborates in the chapter “*Die Entstehung der ästhetischen Formwelt*,” section “4. *Das Problem des ‘Zeichens’ und seine ästhetische Bedeutung*” of *Freiheit und Form. Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte*. The only philosophy of the arts that features in *Freiheit und Form*, this book on the 18th century, is Mendelssohn’s account of the characterizing or signifying powers of the arts (ibid., 93). According to it, the expressively passionate bodily movements result in two kinds of artistic signs: the natural signs of the fine arts of painting, sculpture, music, and dance, and the arbitrary signs of what were then called the fine ‘sciences’ of poetry and eloquence. It is the specificity of these various ‘signs’ of art and not the imitable nature outside of us that determines the formations of these arts. Mendelssohn writes in 1757:

[T]he poet has [...] set before himself an ideal beauty as a model, and sought out in nature the traits that together form such a perfect character. He has beautified nature. With regard to the art of sound, this truth shines far more clearly into the eyes. The sounds of nature are expressive, but rarely melodic, and the artist must embellish them if he wishes to please. This is also what the dancer does, for example, when he imitates the casual movements of a shepherd, but combines them with propriety and art. [...] The signs by means of which an object is expressed can be either natural or arbitrary. They are natural if the connection of the sign with the thing signified is founded in the properties of the signified itself. The passions are, by their nature, connected with certain movements in the limbs of our body, as well as with certain sounds and gestures. Whoever, therefore, expresses an

affective movement [sentiment, *Gemütsbewegung*] by means of the sounds, gestures and movements that belong to it, makes use of natural signs. On the other hand, those signs are called arbitrary which, by virtue of their nature, have nothing in common with the thing signified, but have nevertheless been arbitrarily adopted for it. Of this kind are the articulated sounds of all languages, the letters, the hieroglyphic signs of the ancients, and some allegorical images. (Mendelssohn 1997, 177f.)

One can claim that Cassirer makes Mendelssohn's semiotic aesthetics *qua* philosophy of the arts his project.⁴ It might have changed only insignificantly for Cassirer, through transformations in the 19th (Hegel) and 20th centuries. Even if Cassirer did not return to Mendelssohn's philosophy of the arts later, neither in *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* from 1932, nor in *Five Studies*, nor in *Essay on Man*, the continuing relevance of his intervention remains undiminished. After all, he confirms the "insight into the characteristic law of form of every art [...] through its characteristic means of expression" (Cassirer 2001, 94) and extends it to the principle of all symbolic forms in his article for the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*:

[T]he law of style, and thus the law of inner truth, under which each individual art stands, [...] [t]he conformity to this inner norm, which is a norm of forming, is what gives the formation its stability in the first place. In this sense, the aesthetics of [...] Mendelssohn [...] has already pronounced the thought that, in order to arrive at a secure delimitation of the object area and the representational [objectual, *gegenständliche*] possibilities of every art, we must begin with the kind of signs it uses. The determination of an art lies in what it can do by virtue of its specific signs, not in what other arts can do just as well, if not better. [...] If we turn this basic idea into a general one, then it immediately contains the demand to question all areas of the spirit in general, as well as the individual arts, according to the law of

⁴ I also feel encouraged to this view by Guido Kreis (2010), who understands the "system schema: expression, representation, meaning" (392–401) in Cassirer's "System of Symbolic Forms" (388) as "semiotics" (500).

their formation and to understand the objectual structures, which become visible in them, from this law. (Cassirer 2013b, 270f.)

This approach of a task-specific theory of the arts is also applied to more current concepts of cultural theory in Cassirer's *Five Studies*. What is said of the concepts of epochal styles or the will to art vis-à-vis scientific approaches of aesthetics? "Such expressions do indeed characterize, but they do not determine." (Cassirer 1961, 140) Thus, "the nineteenth-century naturalism of Hippolyte Taine" (ibid., 146) in his *Philosophie de l'art* as an attempted "reduction of cultural science to natural science" (ibid.) cannot avoid to acknowledge the characterization of a "dominant idea (*idée principale*)" in artistic giving (ibid., 154) beyond any nature: The "salient character [...]" is unable to impress itself upon the object in a perfectly clear and visible imprint. Man fills this gap – and in filling it he discovers art." (Ibid., 155f.) A sentence like this one by Taine, Cassirer says, "could appear in any 'idealist' aesthetic" (ibid., 156). Indeed, it undermines naturalism. Taine "is determined to explain not only poetry, painting and sculpture, but even architecture and music as 'imitating arts,' with the result, of course, that he is forced to resort to an extremely artificial and forced construction" (ibid., 156 fn.).⁵

1.3 Poetry and the Arts in Cassirer's Engagement with Croce⁶

The insurmountable "stumbling block" (Cassirer 2006, 152) for imitation theories of art, Cassirer argues, is that lyric poetry does not imitate but invent worlds. By

⁵ Architecture is delineated by Cassirer in this way: "This beauty, which originates from the perfect solution to a static problem [the construction of the Eiffel Tower, P. M.], is, however, not of the same type and origin as the beauty that confronts us in the work of poets, sculptors, and musicians: for the latter beauty is not based on 'being bound' by the forces of nature but exhibits a new and unique synthesis of I and world. If we can denote the world of *expression* and the world of pure *signification* as the two extremes between which all cultural development moves, then the ideal balance between them is, as it were, achieved in art." (Cassirer 2013c, 312f.) This passage has been recalled by Orth (2004a, 314).

⁶ I am aware that Croce's account of the arts would deserve a much more detailed presentation and discussion both of which I do not give in what follows.

making us see the ideality of the eternal in the transitory, lyric poetry also serves an important function in the philosophy of the arts.

Cassirer addresses this function on the occasion of his discussion of Benedetto Croce's philosophy of art. Croce (2007, 15) had believed that "intuition means, precisely, the lack of distinction between reality and unreality, [...] the pure ideality of the image". Intuition according to Croce is already art in itself because of its emotional representation and emotional tension. "[A]rt is always lyric of feeling or, if one prefers, epic and dramatic." (Ibid., 24) Also "all the arts are music" (ibid., 25). The arts merge into a single genre due to their basic lyrical-musical character. "Between the universal and the particular no intermediate element is interposed [...], no series of genres or of species, of *generalialia* [of art, P. M.]." (Ibid., 40) Thus, "single works of art are then infinite: all original, each untranslatable into the other". (Ibid.) In contrast, Cassirer (1961, 84) holds that

[...] if the lyric poem were to do nothing else than to fix in words the momentary and individual feelings of poets, it would not be different from any other verbal expression. All lyricism would be merely verbal expression, all speech would be lyricism.

Cassirer accuses Croce that he "thinks it sheer rhetoric to speak of a beautiful river or tree" (Cassirer 2006, 164). Yet, in addition to the *genus proximum* of expression, there is also "the specific difference of lyric expression" (Cassirer 1961, 84):

[...] the context of a poem cannot be separated from its form – from the verse, the melody, the rhythm. These formal elements are not merely external or technical means to reproduce a given intuition; they are part and parcel of the artistic intuition itself. (Cassirer 2006, 168)

Cassirer sees precisely these formal elements of artistic intuition at work in the approximate genre unity of poetic and prosaic spheres in 19th century literary realism (ibid., 170). Poetry, however, unlike language in general and the other arts, cannot be merely a heightened enunciation of a sentiment or mood. "If the lyric poet succeeds," Cassirer says with Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*, "in giving 'melody and speech' to pain, he has thereby not only thrown a new shell around it; he has thereby transformed it inwardly." (Ibid., 168) It is worth quoting Goethe

(2016, 247f.), who at the end of his 1790 play has the poet Tasso summarize his fate thus:

Nature endowed us with the gift of tears,
The agonized outcry when at last a man
Can bear no more – and me above all others –
In pain she left me euphony and speech
To voice the deepest amplitude of my grief:
When in their anguish other men fall silent
A god gave me the power to tell my pain.⁷

According to Cassirer, Croce, on the other hand, is “interested only in the fact of expression, not in the mode” and in the “material factor” of embodiment (Cassirer 2006, 153). The material constraint of the external reproduction of intuition, however, is indispensable for the communication of works. “For a great painter, a great musician, or a great poet, the colors, the lines, rhythms, and words are not merely a part of his technical apparatus; they are necessary moments of the productive process itself.” (Ibid., 154) This is as true of “the representative arts” (ibid., 138) as of “the objective and the subjective, the representative and the expressive arts” (ibid., 146).

Cassirer sees Croce (2007) operating with mere nomenclature of arts. In this way, however, arts can be classified neither factually nor representationally (Cassirer 1961, 204f.). If no epicists, dramatists, painters, or musicians existed, works of art would disintegrate into mere properties and intuitions. There is, however, unifying artistic conception that accompanies artistic technique. (Ibid.) According to Cassirer, artists achieve the particularity of singular works through the acquisition and mastery of techniques. Color, line, rhythm, and verse are not merely parts of the technical apparatus (Cassirer 2006, 168, 154). The artistic “*technique* of the construction of the work” goes hand in hand with the “*conception* of the work of art” (Cassirer 1961, 206). Also, intuition is either musical or plastic or,

⁷ “Die Träne hat uns die Natur verliehen, / Den Schrei des Schmerzens [sic!], wenn der Mann zuletzt / Es nicht mehr trägt – Und mir noch über alles –/ Sie ließ im Schmerz mir Melodie und Rede, / Die tiefste Fülle meiner Not zu klagen: / Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt, / Gab mir ein Gott, zu sagen, wie ich leide.” (Goethe 1998a, 166)

indeed, lyrical. To be sure, Cassirer, like Croce ostensibly, is against a canon of the arts and especially against the primacy of one art (ibid., 206) as in Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and still in the later 19th century. Nevertheless, following Cassirer, “true differences of style, divergent directions of artistic intention” remain “in every type of artistic composition,” in both lyric poetry and any other “specific form [*Gestalt*]” (ibid., 208f.).

The fact that lyric poetry comes into play for Cassirer in yet another way is shown by his remark about Giambattista Vico, who was brought back into the discussion by Croce at the time. According to Vico and Cassirer, historically for the first time in the divine age and its “logic of imagination,” (Cassirer 2006, 166) had been produced not yet concepts, but myths or poetic images. Myth and art would have their roots in this until today:

The poet and the maker of myth seem, indeed, to live in the same world. [...] it is one of the greatest privileges of art that it can never lose this “divine age.” [...] In every age and in every great artist the operation of the imagination reappears in new forms and in new force. In the lyrical poets, first and foremost, we feel this continuous rebirth and regeneration. (Ibid.)⁸

⁸ We cannot deal here with the proof of the proximity or partial identity of lyric poetry and myth, or with the extent to which Cassirer’s 1925 booklet *Sprache und Mythos. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen* (Cassirer 1946) and *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2: Mythical Thinking* (Cassirer 2021b), also published in 1925, got in the way of an elaboration of a philosophy of art. A quotation from *Language and Myth* (Cassirer 1946), translated by Susanne Langer, should indicate the difficult situation: “[A]rt, like language, is originally bound up entirely with myth. Myth, language and art begin as a concrete, undivided unity, which is only gradually resolved into a triad of independent modes of spiritual creativity. Consequently, the same mythic animation and hypostatization which is bestowed upon the words of human speech is originally accorded to images, to every kind of artistic representation. Especially in the magical realm, word magic is everywhere accompanied by picture magic. The image, too, achieves its purely representative, specifically ‘aesthetic’ function only as the magic circle with which the mythical consciousness surrounds it is broken, and it is recognized not as a mythico-magical form, but as particular sort of *formulation*. But although language and art become emancipated, in this fashion, from their native soil of mythical thinking, the ideal, spiritual unity of the two is reasserted upon a higher level. [...] But there is one intellectual realm in which the word not only preserves its original creative power [in the original: *Bildkraft*], but is ever renewing it; [...]. This regeneration is achieved as

1.4 Syntax and Vocabulary, Idioms and Pathos Formulas

Artistic techniques contain “a determinate vocabulary,” the “reservoir of formal elements of the painter, the sculptor, the architect” or other artists; this vocabulary is joined by a “syntax’ [...], much as there is a syntax of language” (Cassirer 1961, 200). That is, one of the techniques – an art – is developed and tested on “the nature of the materials in which the artist works” (ibid., 201). Thus, artistic intuition is medially differentiated from the very beginning: “Beethoven’s intuition is musical, Phidias’s intuition is plastic, Milton’s intuition is epic, Goethe’s intuition is lyric.” (Ibid., 206) In addition, there is the “language of form” and with it “certain ‘pathos formulas’” (ibid., 202). This is how “artistic forms” gain “inner fixity and consistency” (ibid., 203f.) and “at the same time, they must, of necessity, be capable of modification” (ibid.). This polarity of form and material is in each case constitutive for the differentiation of the “various species of art” (ibid.). Artists externalize feelings by forming characteristic idioms, ways of speaking, even entire arts by means of form-elementary materiality and sensuous forms.

On the one hand, Cassirer borrows the *form-elementary materiality* of the finite from, of all things, the philosophy of German idealism:

Art is, indeed, symbolism, but the symbolism of art must be understood in an immanent, not in a transcendent sense. Beauty is “The Infinite finitely presented” according to Schelling. The real subject of art [...] is to be sought in certain fundamental structural elements of our sense experience

language becomes an avenue of artistic expression.” (Ibid., 98) Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson would have agreed with that proximity of lyrical poetry and myth when Lévi-Strauss (1971, 230) opines in 1955 that the “structure, at once historical and ahistorical, explains that myth belongs both to the domain of the spoken word [parole] [...] as well as in that of language [langue] [...] and thereby [...] has the same character of an absolute object,” and repeats with Roman Jakobson (1962): “We want [...] to give the poem the character of an absolute object” (Jakobson & Lévi-Strauss 2007, 276). This ‘absolute object’ must have inspired Jacques Derrida to submit the topic “L’idéaliété de l’objet littéraire” for a *thèse* to Jean Hyppolite in the late 1950s (Derrida 1990, 442f.), a suggestion that stands at the origin of poststructuralist philosophy where Derrida deals with Husserl’s concept of ideality in the *Introduction à Husserl. L’origine de la géométrie* from 1962 and in *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* from 1967.

itself – in lines, design, in architectural, musical forms. These elements are, so to speak, omnipresent. Free of all mystery, they are patent and unconcealed; they are visible, audible, tangible. [...] [A]rt [...] sticks to the surface of natural phenomena. (Cassirer 2006, 170f.)

On the other hand, Cassirer recognizes a *sensuous determinacy of form* in which the arts ‘speak’ and through which they aggregate to each other. That is, structural elements can be combined, if not immediately into arts, then at least into typical artistic ways of speaking:

The idioms of the various arts may be interconnected, as, for instance, when a lyric [poetry, P. M.] is set to music or a poem is illustrated; but they are not translatable into each other. Each idiom has a special task to fulfil in the “architectonic” of art. (Ibid., 167)

Cassirer connects these two aspects in the following way:

Externalization means visible or tangible embodiment not simply in a particular material medium – in clay, bronze, or marble – but in sensuous forms, in rhythms, in color pattern, in lines and design, in plastic shapes. It is the structure, the balance and order, of these forms which affects us in the work of art. Every art has its own characteristic idiom, which is unmistakable and unexchangeable. (Ibid.)

With this renewed commitment to the characterizing power of art, Cassirer emphasizes that in the arts, too, a formative spiritual energy impacts matter. The “formative process is carried out in a certain sensuous medium” (ibid., 153). There is a mediality specific to art. That is, between the subjective sensuous world and the objective everyday world there exists “the realm of plastic, musical, poetical forms; and these forms have a real universality” (ibid., 157f.).⁹

⁹ In a similar way, Stanley Cavell (1979) speaks of media and contends “that giving significance to and placing significance in specific possibilities and necessities [...] of the physical medium [...] are the fundamental acts” (ibid., xiii) of “artistic discoveries of form and genre and type and technique” (ibid., 105). Art is about the “*creation of a medium* by [...] giving significance to specific possibilities” (ibid., 32), so that “our

1.5 Summary Cassirer

The basic principle on which Cassirer constructs everything else with an idealistic Goethe reads: the ideality of the intuitive formation of the arts consists in the visualization of the eternal in the transitory. Describing in an ideal way, arts transform life into an ideal world of pure, sensuous forms. Cassirer aligns three circles of thought with this. They concern the signs, the lyric, and the linguistic of the arts.

First: The ideality of a characterizing art is abandoned from the 18th century, from Mendelssohn onwards in various kinds of specific signs, in plastic, musical, poetic forms. Intuition and style are bound to the inner norm of these signs.

Second: With the lyric, the ideality of an ideal way of thinking is present. The dramatic, the epic and other qualities are contained in the lyric. Along this, formal elements of intuition are shaped in the material mode of a unity of technique and conception.

Third: In the arts are contained a ‘syntax’ and an artistic vocabulary, a store of ‘linguistic’ formal elements. They yield units of form-elemental materiality and sensuous form-determinacy: idioms and pathos formulas that can be combined with each other yielding works.

2 Nelson Goodman, Combination of the Two Positions on Ideality?

“Whoever studies general linguistics, according to Croce, studies aesthetic problems – and vice versa.” (Cassirer 2006, 182) In light of the discussion above, it is understandable that Cassirer would distance himself from Croce’s *Aesthetics as a Science of Expression and General Linguistics* (1905). Yet, it is precisely this fusion of linguistics and aesthetics that is sought by a number of aestheticians: by Robin Collingwood, Susanne Langer, and by philosophical aesthetics based on the premises of analytic philosophy of language. Nelson Goodman, for example, recasts the

attention turns from the physical medium [...] in general to the specific forms or genres the medium has taken in the course of its history” (ibid., 29). Marion Lauschke (2007, 218) focuses the issue outlined by Cassirer in this way: “The genre, comparable to the material, is the medium and limit of expression.”

relationship between language and art in terms of a field of *Languages of Art*. But conversely, the symbolic form of the arts as a “symbolic system” (Cassirer 2006, 29), Cassirer’s critique of the imitation theory of art, and a theory of metaphor elaborated with reference to Cassirer, among other things, enter into Goodman’s (1976, chs. I and II) treatise of ideal language analytic philosophy under that very title, *Languages of Art*, which leads him to expand types of reference with respect to the arts.

On the other hand, *Languages of Art* connects to Husserl-like perspectives. This is done by Goodman primarily with semiotician Charles Peirce and a formal-structural illumination of the notation for the symbolic art system of music, but also for dance, architecture, and theater play (chs. IV and III). What Peirce calls the universe of discourse, occasionally mentioned by Cassirer (Cassirer 2006, 37, 164, 227), and extends in the *Studies in Logic* from 1883 by the universe of marks, probably including notation, surprisingly resembles Husserl’s semiotics of an ideality of the linguistic.

3 Husserl’s Philosophy of the Arts and its Position on Ideality

This ideality of the linguistic is one of the many small sprinklings of aesthetics that occur throughout Husserl’s writings, but nothing more, although Husserl had aesthetic experience and even occasional contact with contemporary artists of repute such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Oskar Kokoschka, and Arnold Zweig, the latter of them studied briefly with him. But what a sprinkling!

3.1 The Ideality of Language

As if pulled out of the sleeve, right on the first pages of Husserl’s *Formal and Transcendental Logic* from 1929 (Husserl 1969), there is a longer remark that contains nothing less than a systematic philosophy of art *in nuce*. Barely more than two pages long, it is entitled “§ 2. The ideality of the linguistic. Elimination of the problems pertaining to it” (ibid., 23–26).¹⁰

¹⁰ James Edie (1975) pointed out the differentiation given here with regard to Goodman’s *Languages of Art* which Gérard Genette followed up occasionally and finally did so

Located around the actual realm of the logical, speech has a general ideational quality. With a broadly conceived ‘logos’ can be determined the actual “word [...] as a sensuous [...] phenomenon” of speech on the one hand and the repeatable words “themselves” on the other (ibid., 24). Sensuous in speech is what we hear either through external voices or within us. Sensuous in speech is also what we read. All of this is language, usually understood in a narrower sense. Without dwelling further on the aesthetic, Husserl proceeds almost abruptly to the theory of text and the arts: “In a treatise, in a novel, every word, every sentence is a unique thing that does not multiply” and remains independent of the “multiplicities of illustrating [in the original: *erläuternden*] reproduction” (ibid.), that is, according to the handwritten first version of 1920/21, “the vocalizing [in the original: *lautierenden*] reproduction” (Husserl 1974, 358), as well as “the multiplicities of its permanent documentations by paper and print, parchment and handwriting, or the like” (Husserl 1969, 20) or respectively “ink writing or by cuneiform tablets etc.” (Husserl 1974, 358). However, ‘the one, single linguistic inventory is [...] reproduced,’ that is, ‘we speak [...] of the same book,’ even though we do not read or hear the same copy. According to Husserl, “this identity [in the original: *Selbigkeit*]” of the book, novel, treatise guarantees the “ideality of language [...]: *Language has the Objectivity proper to the objectivities making up the so-called spiritual [geistige] or cultural world, not the Objectivity proper to bare physical Nature. As an Objective product of minds, language has the same properties as other mental products [Gebilde].*” (Husserl 1969, 20)

The ideality of the linguistic, the ‘speech’ of all mental formations, now obviously appears in “other kinds of signs” (ibid.) as well. This semiotic, as one might say, to which Husserl endeavors in a tacitly executed *turn* here, is not

more extensively in *The Work of Art. Immanence and Transcendence* (Genette 1997, 100–107) with an elaboration in a Goodman-oriented philosophy of the arts with Husserlian leaning. On this, see Mahr (2018, 8f.). Husserl employed the concept of ideality already from the 1890s onwards. As ‘ideality of meaning’ it becomes a fixed topos in the *Logical Investigations* (see Husserl 2001a, 87; 1970, § 9; 2014, 148–151, cf. Möckel 1992, 1050f.; Husserl 2001a, 231; 2001b, 79; 1984, 779; 1979, 303ff.). But only after the confusing ambiguous “expression[s] idea and ideal” had been replaced by “the terminologically little used *Eidos*” in *Ideas I* (Husserl 2014, 7), the view of the ideality of language could open up, as Husserl’s writing down around his lectures on *Formal and Transcendental Logic* from 1920 onwards documents.

limited to natural and formal word-languages. It includes the literary and the non-literary arts:¹¹

[...] this engraving, the engraved picture itself, is visually abstracted from each reproduction, being given in each, in the same manner, as an identical ideal object. [...] only in the form of reproduction does it have factual existence in the real world. The situation is just the same when we speak of the Kreutzer Sonata, in contrast to its reproductions *ad libitum*. (Husserl 1969, 20f.)¹²

In the novel, the engraving, the sonata

[...] this ideality is not only one of what is expressed in them [...] as concrete units of linguistic body and expressed sense. [...] [These concrete unities] concern them [this ideality] already with respect to the linguistic corporeality itself, which is, so to speak, a *spiritual corporeality* [...] an ideal unity which does not multiply itself with its thousandfold reproductions. (Ibid., 25)

These units, according to Husserl, result in nothing less than

[...] a realm in and for itself. Here it is only to be noted that language comes into question for the logician primarily in its ideality [...]: quite similarly as the subject of the aesthetician is the respective work of art, the respective sonata, the respective picture not as the temporary physical sound complex or as the physical picture thing, but precisely the picture itself, the sonata

¹¹ In *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl 1973, 265), religion is also considered, at least including the city, just as the *Logical Investigations* already used “the city of Berlin” as an example of an ideal object of logical representation (Husserl 2001a, 241).

¹² For Husserl neither scores play a role, the realizable ‘reproduction’ of a sonata on paper or reproducing copying of notes, nor that a picture could do without something ideal as for instance Kandinsky’s *First Abstract Water-Color* of 1910. Husserl runs the risk to efface the difference between the relation of musical notes to the ‘reproduction’ in performing on the one side and the relation of printed/handwritten musical notes to (re)print/transcript reproduction on the other. See for that and ‘picture’ of the sonata here below (3.3.) Adorno 2001, 1f., 148, 183 (!), 189f. and his all over reference to the x-ray image.

itself – the actual aesthetic object, as in the parallel case the actual grammatical one. (Ibid.)¹³

And in the preliminary version of § 2 from 1920/21 it says immediately afterwards:

If an absolutely faithful reproduction of works of art of any kind were invented, which would repeat the ideal content of the work with absolute indubitability, then the originals would lose any preferential scientific value

¹³ This passage is not only a late response to Theodor Lipps's psychological-philosophical lectures on aesthetics published in 1906 which do not take into account the objective linguistic nature of the arts (Lipps 1920, 36–43: chap.ch. “Die ‘ästhetische Idealität’ des ästhetischen Objekts”). It is also a commentary on Waldemar Conrad's treatise “The Aesthetic Object” (1908/09), oriented on the *Logical Investigations*, according to which in music, poetry, visual and applied arts the “aesthetic object [...] is an ideal one for which it is essential that it be ‘realizable’” (ibid., 453). But it also indicates nothing less than Husserl's struggle for an understanding of aesthetics itself. Paul Janssen (1974, 469–484: “Textkritische Anmerkungen. Ergänzender Text IV”) has reported on Husserl's (1974, 358–360) preliminary version of § 2 of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that in this “starting part of the lecture on transcendental logic first given in the winter semester of 1920/21,” Husserl first wrote “Ästhetikers [as] V[er]besserung]. für Wissenschaftlers” and thus, as Janssen plausibly argues, meant ‘Kunst-Wissenschaftlers’ (ibid., 476). Husserl (1974, 359) later replaced this with “Kunst-Ästhetikers.” In the 1929 printing of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, “Ästhetikers” made it into the text, even though here, too, a few lines later, “Ästhetiker” is used (Husserl 1969, 21). In a larger context, the following should be noted: Considered from the perspective of Kant, Husserl would have had to speak consistently of the ‘transcendental aesthetician’ in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, if he had indeed differentiated Kant's transcendental aesthetics to such an extent that it ultimately had included the aesthetics of art, that is, the philosophy of the arts. This would have made sense for Husserl's *transcendental logic* also in view of his revaluation and rewriting of the Kantian coupling of transcendental aesthetics and transcendental logic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Husserl, however, insists for ‘Aesthetics’ on the Kantian justification of a physical science of nature in the conclusion of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: In the gradual ascent of the “logos of objective worldly being [...] arises [...] not [a] ‘descriptive’ science, which captures ‘aesthetic’ entities [of nature] [...], but an idealizing-logifying one. [...] [a] Platonizing geometry, which does not speak of straight lines, circles, etc. in the ‘aesthetic’ sense and of their *apriori*, that of the appearing in real and possible appearance, but of the regulative idea of such a space of appearance, the ‘ideal space’ with ‘ideal straight lines,’ etc. All ‘exact’ physics operates with such ‘idealities’” (ibid., 297). Thus, Husserl no longer speaks of the arts as bracketed by the “elimination of the associated problems” (ibid., 23), but returns to the restricted Kantian transcendental aesthetic of the ideality of space and time.

for the art-aesthetician, they would retain only an affective value: similar to the literary originals [*Urschriften*], after they have been faithfully reproduced with regard to their linguistic stock. (Husserl 1974, 359f.)¹⁴

3.2 Ideality and Culture

Although the matters of the linguistic and its formations are to remain excluded, they incessantly recur in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. They continue to be inscribed into the realm of culture. For instance, “the thoughts that are thought in the thinking [...] are [...] unreal formations produced by the mind; [...] they admit, however, of a physical embodiment [...] and gain [...] and thus they gain a secondary spatial existence” (Husserl 1969, 155; see also Husserl 1973, 265–267). Thus, at stake is

[...] the *ideality of the formations with which logic is concerned* [...] of a separate, self-contained, “world” of ideal Objects and [...] formations that can be rightly accounted as ideal Objects in an ideal “world.” [...] idealities [...] in the cultural world [...] which must surely be considered as real. (Husserl 1969, 260f.)

Also,

[...] *it is not only the case that for each object there is a peculiar evidence: the evidence of it and the object itself, as evident, exercise functions that overlap* ‘those of other evidences and objects’. Every cultural object is an example. Any cultural object is an example. The ideality in which its peculiar being consists becomes “embodied” in a material objectivity [...]; and consequently the evidence of the Objective cultural determination is founded on an evidence relating to Nature, and intimately combined with this evidence. (Ibid., 288)

¹⁴ As if commenting on this, Walter Benjamin (2002, 103f.) linked the loss of authenticity and aura of works of art to their ever-improving mechanical technology of reproduction, observing that with respect to this development and particularly to photography the “*exhibition value begins to drive back cult value on all fronts*” (ibid., 23).

Can culture be the object of a transcendental logic? As ideality of logical entities probably yes, without the internal differentiation of, for example, artistic and non-artistic formations playing a role here.

3.3 The Image of an Artistic Formation

Husserl continuously speaks of partly aesthetic formations. Indeed, formations constitute what is at stake in the arts besides other cultural activities. But he does not base the concept of artistic formation [*Gebilde*] on an analysis of the concept of the image, where such an analysis could ground the aesthetic of the aesthetic object and formation indeed. Rather, his differentiation of the ‘image’ of the sonata or the visual image transcends a categoriality beyond the visual arts.

This is expressed as early as 1905 when Husserl reflects on the “multiple imaging” (*mehrfältige Bildlichkeit*) (Husserl 2005a, 189) of engraving and (!) sonata which he does apart from the “multiple kinds of imaging” (*mehrfache Bildlichkeit*) (ibid., 182). Husserl runs through a declension of this pictoriality with the example of a photographic reproduction of a reproduction of Titian’s painting *Heavenly Love*: “a charming little advertising image [= 3], P. M.] [...] lies before me [...] as a picture of the large reproduction” of the engraving (ibid., 182): “1) The engraving as image of the original: The original is the Madonna in Dresden. 2) The engraving as image: I immerse myself in it visually and have the image [painting, P. M.] of the Madonna.” (Ibid., 189)

However, in music, the ideality of the musically linguistic crosses with the comparison of renderings or performances at “the ideal (‘How Beethoven himself conceived of the Sonata,’ or how it ‘should’ be played).” (Ibid., 190) Thus, the *First Logical Investigation* had stated that the “ideality of meanings is no ideality in the normative sense” if, in the latter, “a young artist takes the work of a great master as the ideal” (Husserl 2001a, 231). Apart from this, ‘image’ is to be applied in a threefold manner: the “physical image *in individuo*” first, and that which is offered to the “imaging consciousness” of the “image object” second, as well as to the consciousness of the image “subject” third (Husserl 2005a, 182). In this context, image-*sujet* means the musical “subject of the work” (ibid., 190) to be performed, the reproduction of a sonata by the piano player and [...] the sonata just as Beethoven meant it. Or rather, as the person who brings about this image consciousness [...]. Everyone has his ideal Beethoven.” (Ibid., 189) To these three

meanings of image adds a fourth “pure perceptual figment” in the form of the spectacle which is “from the beginning only the artistic ‘image’” (Husserl 2005b, 617f.). Husserl (2005a, 159) specifies the work of art’s fully immanent

Ideally: I study the Sonata: Demands that the parts of the aesthetic whole reciprocally exert – this would correspond to the knowledge of the subject of the work and of its aesthetic presentation in these tonal structures. As in the case of any art work, “absorption” is needed in order to produce the interpretation adequate to it. What did the artist intend to present, and how did he intend to present it? What feelings did he want to excite, and so on? But not abstract reflection. In itself, every aesthetic apperception is ambiguous. Which interpretation [*Deutung*] is the appropriate one? Which attitude toward the image, which mood, and so on? Understanding the image yields this.

Again, Husserl (2005c, 651–654) traverses the arts between 1916 and 1918 in the fragment “On the Theory of Art.” There he states that the arts are about our actual “real world” or “some world”: “All art moves between these two extremes.” (Ibid., 651) This is done on the one hand by “image art [...] in depicting,” and on the other hand by the “[a]rt that is purely a matter of phantasy,” for instance with a proverbial phrase such as “once upon a time” or with “music, [with] playful fantasy” (ibid.). To the two parallel distinctions of depiction and generation and pictorial art and fantasy-forming literature/music Husserl ties a third distinction of “[r]ealistic art fiction, painting, sculpture)” (ibid., 652) and “[i]dealistic fiction” (ibid., 653). Unlike the positivistically oriented realist, the “idealistic author [...] has a *normative* focus.” (ibid.) and “sees ideas and ideals, and, in seeing them, values them and sets them forth as values.” (Ibid.)

3.4 Summary Husserl

Everything in the definition of the arts derives from the ideality of the linguistic. As with other mental formations, the linguistic inventory is reproducible from the outset. A (literary) text does not multiply itself; it is unique independently of multiplicities.

As with the natural and the formal word languages, the literary, but also some non-literary arts are concerned with units of ideal sensuous-linguistic body with expressed ideal sense. These units constitute the aesthetic object and share the ideality of logical formations.

The ‘image’ of each artistic formation is traced back to the formation-*sujet*, its idea. This is what carries the aesthetic object. By contrast, there are ideas and ideals beheld and valued first and foremost in (idealistic) poetry. They exist vis-à-vis the realistic art of painting and sculpture. But they also exist vis-à-vis poetry whenever it is realistic. There is the ideal of a staging or embodiment of the work of art.

4 Acquaintance, Appraisal and Distancing

There is hardly any other writing in which Cassirer’s ambivalent stance towards Husserl is more evident than in the *Five Studies on the Logic of the Humanities*, though not only here. In general, Cassirer grants Husserl some achievements. Yet he is aware of the far-reaching difference between the two of them.

Husserl’s ideating abstraction, it is true, could be used to justify a concept of culture such as Jacob Burckhardt’s “Renaissance Man” or other “genuine concepts of style in the humanities” as independent entities (Cassirer 1961, 140). Thus would be confirmed, historically, Husserl’s “ideational abstraction [...] [or] ‘meaning’ in [...] ideal sense [...] that several men may, at the same or different times, have the same presentation, memory, expectation” (Husserl 2001b, 123).

Husserl, it is true, rightly distinguishes in the *Logical Investigations* “between the form as an ‘ideal unity of meaning’ and the psychological experience, the ‘acts’ of taking-as-true, of beliefs, judgments, which refer themselves to this unity of meaning and have it as their object” (Cassirer 1961, 131; see Husserl 1969, §§ 56–73).

The two sides of objective form and psychological experience, it is true, would not merge into the “simple acts of speech, of artistic creation and enjoyment,” as he emphasizes with Karl Bühler’s and not Husserl’s “ideality of the objects of language” (Cassirer 1961, 131).¹⁵ Accordingly, the psychology of art could no longer

¹⁵ This is Cassirer’s verbatim adoption from Karl Bühler’s *Sprachtheorie*, where Bühler (2011, 68) dissociates Ferdinand de Saussure’s (!) “ideality of the object ‘language’” from Saussure’s alleged lapse from material. Bühler’s *Sprachtheorie* otherwise frequently

suppress the theory of art, for “the domain of a pure ‘theory of pure forms’ has taken shape with ever increasing clarity, a domain which employs other concepts than those of empirical psychology” (ibid.).

And it is true, when Cassirer in a 1920s fragment on the “*Metaphysik des Symbolischen*” (Cassirer 1995, 259–271), sees emerging in the “whole development of ‘pure logic’ [...] a detached inventory of the logical” (ibid., 269), he would even be willing to acknowledge “Husserl’s ‘third realm’” (ibid., 270).¹⁶

However and nevertheless, Cassirer’s reference to phenomenology remains critical of Husserl. This emerges at length in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, when Cassirer reflects on Husserl’s distinction between *hylē* and *morphē* (Cassirer 2021c, 234f. on Husserl 2014, § 97) and insists on a unity of the sensuous and the sensible apart from eidetic reduction.¹⁷ Ultimately, Cassirer’s ‘genuine ideality’ seems to remain unmediated vis-à-vis Husserl’s ‘ideality of the linguistic.’ Thus, Cassirer wrote his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* conceptually apart from Husserl (cf. Möckel 2016, 303ff., 309ff.). Obviously, *Ideas I* from 1913 and later works by Husserl found virtually no entry into Cassirer’s writings. Probably Cassirer’s 1924 essay “*Eidos und Eidolon. Das Problem des Schönen und der Kunst in Platons Dialogen*” (Cassirer 2013a) – intended as a philosophy of art and in upholding the ideal as modern-epochal for art – must also be read as a silent protest against Husserl’s *Ideas I* and its anti-idealistic use of ‘eidos’ instead of idea.¹⁸

refers to Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* and *Cartesian Meditations*, but like Cassirer, never to *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.

¹⁶ John Krois (1995, 356, 382) suspects that Cassirer (2013c, 267) alludes to his “idealities as distinct from the physical and the psychic,” to the “realm of pure meaning,” toward the “‘third’ realm” of which strives “language from the sense of expression to the pure sense of representation.” See on this and other posthumous notes Bösch (2002, 161).

¹⁷ This says Bermes (1998, 191). It has often been remarked that Cassirer’s usage of and reference to ‘*Phänomenologie*’ is non-uniform, unsteady, if not fickle, certainly critical at times. For that see Martell (2015, 421, 428); Möckel (1992, 1059); Orth (2004b, 168). According to his own information Husserl seems to have dealt with the problematic of the distinction of *hylē* and *morphē* already in 1910/11 (Husserl 1969, 294–312, in particular 303–310), a fact at which Kaufmann (1949, 816) hints.

¹⁸ In “*Eidos und Eidolon*” Cassirer (2013a, 217) explains the modern ‘ideal’ as a “later offshoot” of Platonic idea: “Later theory [i.e., modern, P. M.] attempted to [...] free art from the reproach of mere ‘imitation’ by substituting for the rigorous Platonic concept of idea [*Idee*] the dazzling and ambiguous concept of the ‘ideal.’” (Ibid., 230f.) Cassirer sees in the aesthetic ideal a hybrid species between the sensuous and the intelligible

If, then, the same interests flare up in Cassirer and Husserl – idealism and realism in literature,¹⁹ the *universe of discourse*, semiotics – both thinkers nevertheless appear like stars circling far away from each other. Thus, ideality does not seem to be able to provide a missing link for the connection of both philosophies.

5 Conclusion, with Bull: Back to the Origin?

It can be stated that Cassirer and Husserl each in their own way strove for ‘ideality’ in the field of the philosophy of the arts. Cassirer aspired to provide the arts with access to the sphere of the ideal world. Husserl endeavored to wrest a linguistic ideality from the structure of logic, which *volens volens* leads into the area of the arts. If one draws the two philosophies of the arts closer to each other, a certain longing arises not only to mediate the two aesthetics, however far they have been developed, but to tackle a meta-theory of ideality for a complementary philosophy of the arts.

One would like to take the bull by its two horns: by the ideality of a critical idealism, in modern form espoused by Cassirer²⁰ and by the ideality of a transcendental

unacceptable not only for mathematics according to Plato (232f.). This view on the historical destiny of ‘idea’ is plausible against the background of the Schiller chapter in *Freiheit und Form* (Cassirer 1918, 419–471): “In art too is involved the antithesis between the striving for infinity and striving for objectivity, between ‘ideality’ and ‘reality,’ between ‘liberty’ and ‘nature.’” (Ibid., 461) All this finds a general confirmation by history of philosophy in Angelica Nuzzo (1995, 100), according to whom Kant replaced the Platonic idea since his dissertation of 1770 with the notion of the ideal. And it is confirmed by the Marburgians who generally thought more of ‘idea’ than of ‘eidos’ (Kaufmann 1949, 818).

¹⁹ Schiller’s (2004, 770) distinction between the realist, who remained from the naïve character, and the idealist, who remained from the sentimental character as their poetic quality respectively, marked the beginning of a long discussion in literary theory of which Cassirer as well as Husserl were probably aware.

²⁰ Cassirer consistently referred to his own position as critical idealism. Unlike the post-Kantians, his roots, formed by Descartes and Leibniz, shoot forth through Kant’s *Third Critique* and early Weimar Classicism to unfold in the philosophy of culture. (See on this, Cassirer 2021a, ix, 9, 13ff.; Bösch 2002, 150; Luft 2015, 167; Möckel 2018, 451; and Renz 2012, 114f., whose two pages moved me to make a belated submission for the successful 2019 Cologne conference which came to a most grateful conclusion with the three editors in a roaring night.)

idealism as phenomenologically oriented by Husserl from *Ideas I* onwards. But who wants to do that?

Note: If you want to take the bull by its two horns ‘critical idealism’ and ‘transcendental idealism,’ you could go back, if not to a possible root of the two idealities in Plato’s doctrine of ideas, then to Kant.²¹

It is questionable whether this return does not leave important things on the way, if, as in the case of Husserl and Cassirer, a bend is made around the thinking of ideality in German idealism. For the tradition of thinking ideality in German idealism for philosophy in general and the philosophy of culture and the arts in particular is considerable. Thus, Fichte (1970, 186, fn. 14) intends, contra Kant, to “prove the ideality of space and time from the demonstrated ideality of objects” (ibid., 171) whereby “the principle: no ideality, no reality, and vice versa, [...] receives confirmation, or [...] the ultimate ground of all consciousness is an interaction of the self [Ich, P. M.] with itself, by way of a not-self that has to be regarded from different points of view” (ibid., 248). Schiller (2004) sees the musical poet Klopstock proving himself “in the field of ideality” (ibid., 734) rather than individuality in the encompassing opposition of naïve individuality and sentimental ideality (ibid., 750) – musical in that music, unlike the visual arts, does not imitate an object or is dominated by imagination through a particular object but, like lyric poetry, produces a “state of mind” (ibid., 735). For Schelling (1978), in the deduction of all knowledge from the “overall ideality of knowledge” of the “*I am*” (ibid., 34), it becomes evident how the I, by practical “overstepping” [in the Original: *Hinausgehen*], “would [...] be ideal, and hence *qua* ideal, or in its ideality, be real and limited” (ibid., 66). And according to Hegel (1970), “form and content [...] rise to ideality” (ibid., 120) from symbolic architecture to classical Greek sculpture to the romantic triad of medieval and Renaissance painting, modern music, and contemporary poetry, with the “incipient ideality of matter” (ibid., 121) being particularly noticeable from music onward.

And yet. Shouldn’t the obvious Platonic inclusions of German idealism be a warning for us to be wary of the uncritical reception of the philosophy of identity?

²¹ One such path runs through medieval philosophy. Angelica Nuzzo refers to Descartes’s translation of the scholastic ‘idealitas’ into ‘thinking subjectivity’ (Nuzzo 1999, 591) and to W. Hamilton’s “On the History of the Word Idea” as well as Gilson’s *Index scolastico-cartésien* (Nuzzo 1995, 81). Already Cassirer (1922) had identified ideality in Cartesianism and Renaissance philosophy in the first volume of his *Erkenntnisproblem*.

Doesn't the question arise whether the historically contemporaneous doctrine of ideas of the philosophical discipline and direction of post-revolutionary sensualist *idéologie* contains something about the theory of ideality before it was deformed into an object of criticism by Marx and positivism? And wouldn't the two philosophical movements of *idéologie* and (German) idealism have to be examined to see how they stand up to Kant's immediately preceding critical transcendental philosophy?

For Cassirer and Husserl, the intended reference to Kant is explicit and obvious. In which way ever Cassirer's critical idealism (see Luft 2015, 74, 162) and Husserl's transcendental idealism (see Möckel 2016, 317) remained limited to certain positionings and did not result in elaborations of the 'ideality' of the arts, now there can be detected indications of a closeness to Kant (1996) who himself thought that critical and transcendental idealism are identical with formal idealism (ibid., 45, 126f.). And yet the two horns seem to exist without a common root in Kant.

Cassirer leaves Kant's *First Critique* behind and moves on to his *Third Critique*. It says that the "*ideality* of purposefulness lies in the beauty of nature" (Kant 2009/10, B252) and is defined in "beautiful art [...] by aesthetic ideas, which are essentially distinguished from ideas of reason of certain purposes" (ibid., B253f.). Here Kant explicitly separates the "idealism of purposefulness, in judgment of the beautiful of nature and art" from the transcendental-aesthetic "*ideality* of the objects of the senses as appearances" (ibid., B254) as found in the *First Critique*, that is, from space and time as ideality of the forms of intuition as the "ideality of outer appearances" whose "doctrine [...] idealism" already was (Kant 1998, A367). It is ultimately this ground of the *Third Critique* on which Cassirer aims at his own genuine ideality and does so starting from Plato's "theory of the ideal world" (Cassirer 2006, 234).

Husserl, by contrast, halts at Kant's *First Critique* and its mathematical ideality of space and time in order to "keep the highly important *Kantian concept of the idea* purely separate from the general concept of the (formal or material) essence" (Husserl 2014, 7). He does so, however, with the benefit of establishing, in some similarity to the formal ideality of numbers and geometrical forms, a formal ideality, now of the linguistic, for the arts as well. The result is the formality of the reproduction of all arts except painting. Ideality appears here as a general epistemological-ontological principle opposite to the ideality of time and space as forms of intuition. Husserl relies on this ideality of transcendental aesthetics in a certain

way ‘objective’ (Kant 1998, A28f., A36, A38), but ties it back to the former principle for his extension in order to semiotically recapture the logical of *logos* for a more general ideality of the linguistic. Thus, this reconnection might also appear in a new light with Kant “proving indirectly the transcendental ideality of appearances, if perhaps someone did not have enough in the direct proof in the Transcendental Aesthetic” (ibid., A506/B534).

But the following question has remained unanswered so far: Is there *one* root of Husserl’s extension of mathematical ideality and Cassirer’s inclusion of the “ideality of purposefulness in the beautiful of nature” and in “the beautiful art” which latter ideality Kant (2009/10, B252f.) addresses only in the *Critique of Judgment* and there only in § 58? To expose this second ideality would be all the more important, since it leads both Kant and his ‘disciples’ to philosophical idealism and with it to an according aesthetics of the arts.

Kant himself is close to recognizing the importance of this ideality for the arts in the *First Critique*. It is true that when he treats “The ideal in general” (Kant 1998, A567–A571/B595–599) he never speaks of ideality. He does so in the *Third Critique* where the “ideality of the objects of the senses as appearances” is placed alongside the “idealism of purposefulness, in judgment of the beautiful of nature and art” (Kant 2009/2010, B254). He could start it with the following: It is the “the *ideal*, [...] the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is [...] determined” (Kant 1998, A568/B596) What else, if not a work of art, could be understood by this?

But here Kant takes a turning to the ethical. Ideals have “practical force” and enable the “perfection of certain *actions*” (ibid., A569/B597). Thus, for example, the Stoic sage with his virtues is an ideal, a “standard for reason” (ibid.). However, this ideal could not be realized in an appearance, an example. Kant thinks that “to try to realize the ideal in an example, [...] such as that of the sage in a novel,” would “render even what is good in the idea suspect by making it similar to a mere fiction” (ibid., A570/B598). But, contra Kant, if the very condition of the possibility of realizing an ideal in a text is conceived (and then discarded), then this presupposes that ideals can be embodied in a text at all, to whatever degree. Therefore, in Kant, the ideality of the ideal world in the arts – Cassirer – seems to be connected with the ideality of the linguistic of the spiritual formations of the arts – Husserl.

Is it not the case that *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Jeanne Dielman* represent vastly unrestricted ‘individuals’? Is a novel in such a way not from the outset something

individualized in terms of content which transcends the seemingly limited objectivity of the subject and the work of art? Kant himself concedes a certain right to the arts when he lets the rejected novel immediately follow the drawing which he acknowledges. “It is [...] otherwise with the creatures of imagination” like “a wavering sketch, as it were, which mediates between various appearances [in the original: *Erfahrungen*]” with which “painters and physiognomes” are concerned not only “in their heads,” but even if only with a “silhouette [in the original *Schattenbild*: phantom, scheme or even images of the camera obscura, P. M.] of their products”. But are such “ideals of sensuality” (ibid.) not also valid for the novel, in which this ideal is combined with the “ideal of reason [...] as a rule and an original image” (ibid.)? Wherein, however, would the ideality of these two ideals consist of, and can it structure the arts, connecting Cassirer and Husserl?

Translated from the German by Thiemo Breyer

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The Mythical Mind and Its World

Husserl and Cassirer on Mythical Consciousness¹

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Abstract: The main aim of this chapter is to offer a systematic comparison of Edmund Husserl's and Ernst Cassirer's understanding of mythical consciousness (or 'mythical mind') and the world-experience of humans in ancient times. Both Husserl and Cassirer regarded this to be a crucial topic for understanding certain essential features of human subjectivity in general. For both authors, the mythical mind serves as an original foundation of cultural development and history, as well as an original form of human spirit. They agree that myth is not straightforwardly something irrational, but instead understand myth to have its own particular logic and rationality. According to both Husserl and Cassirer, forms of cultural achievement which develop later in the history of humankind – such as religion, science, art, and philosophy – can be found in a very rudimentary form in mythical subjectivity. Indeed, these expressions of subjectivity are intimately interwoven. Theory and praxis, as well as mind and world, are deeply and closely related in the mythical mind – more closely, perhaps, than in any other form of human thought. Husserl's phenomenological approach always took the egological perspective as the fundamental point of departure and fixed point of orientation, while Cassirer offered a rather more intersubjective and intercultural analysis of mythical consciousness and mythology in general. However, I argue here that their respective methods could be unified in one single phenomenological account of mythical

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subjectivity, which, I believe, could be used fruitfully in contemporary research to understand the psychological, historical, and cultural importance of mythical consciousness and mythology.

Keywords: Husserl, Cassirer, Phenomenology, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Mythology, Mythical Consciousness

1 Introduction

Mythical consciousness might be understood as the childhood of the mind in the history of humankind. Edmund Husserl certainly understood myth in this way. His contemporary Ernst Cassirer, a leading Neo-Kantian figure of the time, was rather more cautious and skeptical about hierarchical and stratified approaches to understanding cultural formations and achievements (i.e., layer-cake models); he tended to treat all cultural complexes and systems on the same level, in a quite egalitarian way. Despite the different accents and motifs in their respective interpretations of myth and the mythical mind, there was an essential point which both Husserl and Cassirer shared. They both maintained that understanding and adequately explaining the mythical consciousness of the ancient world could shed light on all other forms of culture and human consciousness, and that myth can disclose (under proper scientific investigation) something fundamental about the essence of human existence as such.

There are strong parallels but also remarkable differences between these two authors. Husserl's phenomenological stance took the egological² perspective as the ultimate point of orientation, and his method was essentially descriptive; the description of the phenomena which appear to consciousness or

² 'Egological' here refers to a first-person perspective approach to philosophical analysis. It refers to an essential feature of the phenomenological method, according to which we must find a way to secure, at least theoretically, an intuitive (*anschauliche*) basis for our thoughts, assumptions, and constructions. So, the egological perspective ultimately refers to the "principle of all principles," according to which "every originary presentative intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition" (Husserl 1983, 44). In the context of a phenomenological analysis of the mythical mind, the egological approach seeks a way to phenomenologically reconstruct the mythical world-experience of pre-modern humans. 'Egological' thus in no way means 'solipsistic' or 'primordial.'

the ego. He approached mythical consciousness through a process of dismantling and reconstruction; in an archaeological manner, he tried to ‘dig down’ to the most ancient layers of historical consciousness. With Cassirer, there was no such dominance of the egological perspective. ‘Phenomenology’ was also something essential to him; the subtitle of the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has the subtitle: *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*. However, he used this term fundamentally in the Hegelian sense, drawing on the way Hegel had applied this concept in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In Cassirer’s own words:

While speaking of phenomenology of knowledge, I do not use the word “phenomenology” in its modern sense, rather in its fundamental signification as established and systematically grounded by Hegel. For Hegel, it became the basis of all philosophical knowledge, since he insisted that philosophical knowledge must encompass the totality of cultural forms, and since in his view this totality can be made visible only in the transitions from one form to another. (Cassirer 1957, xiv)

For Cassirer, phenomenology was the theory of cultural, spiritual, and historical formations and productions. He approached the phenomenon of the mythical mind through an understanding of intersubjective community.

Both Husserl and Cassirer interpreted mythical consciousness as a state of mind that grasped the world (as *cosmos*) as a coherent totality, conceiving the human being as a part of this totality. Both were of the opinion, furthermore, that every mythical worldview had, as a fundamental part of the mythological system in question, a myth of origins, which offered an explanation to ancient humans concerning the origins and emergence of the cosmos and its structure (see Husserl 1993, 41–46; 1970a, 283;³ cf. Cassirer 1955). For Cassirer, however, *symbols* played a crucial role in the explanation of human existence in general, and for the mythical mind in particular. The essential capacity of humans, according to Cassirer, is to create symbols and articulate everything in symbolic

³ “The mythical-religious attitude exists when the world as a totality becomes thematic, but in a practical way; by ‘world’ we mean here, of course, the world which is concretely, traditionally valid for the civilization in question” (ibid.).

form. The human being is – in his opinion – an *animal symbolicum*, a “symbol-making animal” (Cassirer 1960, 40). Moreover, according to Cassirer, these symbolic forms also experience themselves – just as in Hegel’s philosophy. Husserl also concerned himself with understanding the role of symbols, studying this throughout his entire career (see, e.g., Husserl 1970b, 340–373; Husserl 1970a, 353–378). Nevertheless, in his opinion, symbols figure as external means of communication and documentation, and as arbitrary tools for expressing thoughts and feelings.

Cassirer took *language* to be the primary and most fundamental symbolic layer. It is no coincidence that the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is about language; even its subtitle concerns ‘Language’ (Cassirer 1980). It is the *conditio sine qua non* of every other – so-called ‘higher-order’ – symbolic form, and, in a certain respect, of human existence as such. He also uses the term ‘symbol’ in another way, as we just mentioned, with reference to ‘higher-order symbols,’ which he understood to be founded by linguistic signs (lower-order symbols). These ‘higher-order symbols’ represent and express complex ideas and states of affairs (e.g., the dove is a symbol of peace, the heart is a symbol of love, etc.).⁴ The motifs of symbols and language are strong throughout Cassirer’s work, to the extent that we might find a form of moderate *linguistic relativism* therein. According to Cassirer, language and symbols in general make up the universal medium of all human existence, activity, and accomplishment.

This chapter focuses on Husserl’s and Cassirer’s accounts of mythical existence, as based on the above-mentioned methodological foundations. It is my hope that the comparative analysis of these two approaches to the mythical mind could lay the foundations for a synthetic investigation – one which could fruitfully connect Husserl’s more egological descriptions with the more intersubjective Hegelian account presented by Cassirer. I believe that such a synthesis could also contribute to contemporary comparative research, across mythological and religious studies, on the mythical mind and existence.⁵

⁴ This also includes visual symbols (concrete ideas which represent abstract ones), metaphors, etc.

⁵ Contemporary comparative studies on mythology and religion can be found in work by authors like Wendy Doniger, Jaan Puhvel, Michael Witzel, and Robert Wright, just to mention a few.

2 Husserl on the Mythical World of Ancient Humans

Husserl's interest in mythical consciousness and mythical world-views began to develop in the 1930s, when he delved deeper into the problem of history. By this time, he had already referred to the question of myth in the *Kaizo* articles from 1923/24 (Husserl 1988, 60, 65, 76, 102ff.). He devoted himself more systematically to the problem of myth and mythology for the first time, however, in the 1930s, when he more intensively elaborated his conception of the lifeworld and its historicity, in connection with the writing of his last main work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (see, e.g., Husserl 1970a, 282–285; 1973, 217; 1993, 37–46; 2008, 165–170).

First and foremost, Husserl approached the problem of myth in the context of his philosophy of history, the progress of the historical world, and the human mind. He understood myth essentially as the childhood of mankind – the early stage of human thought and history (see Husserl 1970, 279–285; 1993, 40–46). In his view, history *in the strict sense* first began when people emerged out of the period characterized by mythical thought (see Husserl 1993, 40f.). In his famous letter to the French ethnologist, cultural anthropologist, and sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, he referred to the “lack of history of the primitives” (*Geschichtslosigkeit der Primitiven*,” Husserl 1994a, 162; see also Moran & Steinacher 2008). Husserl, however, just like Cassirer and Lévy-Bruhl, also acknowledges and emphasizes that mythical consciousness has a particular *logic* of its own.

Myth, according to Husserl, necessarily takes the form of a *narrative* or a *story* (see Steinbock 1995, 177, 194, 243) and, in this way, it has essentially two functions in the life of ancient and primitive communities – a cognitive function and a socio-historical function. Myth's cognitive function offers a total and coherent explanation of the envioning world of pre-modern humans. It is mythos that first makes the world intelligible. With respect to myth's socio-historical function, myth as a narrative does not only render the world intelligible but it also creates and continuously maintains ancient peoples' *cultural and collective identities*. In this context, I argue, the late Husserl's concept of self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) is especially important. As we will see in more detail below, Husserl understood the problem of self-preservation to be situated on both physical and spiritual

levels (see Lee 1993, 193–197). Myths shape the collective and cultural identity of a community. The members of the community somehow identify themselves with the basic mythology – or religion – of the community. They experience every actual or potential offense against their mythological or religious system as a threat to their existence in the deeper sense of the word – that is to say, as a threat to their *spiritual existence*.

We should also mention that Husserl was well-versed in contemporaneous research concerning the mythical worldviews and lives of ancient humans. Along with other sources, he was familiar with, and very enthusiastic concerning, the works of Lévy-Bruhl (see Moran & Steinacher 2008; Moran 2002, 86, 182; 2012, 104, 136, 156ff., 175, 203, 206, 210f.); he also read and admired the second volume of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.⁶

2.1 The Cognitive Function of Myth

In Husserl's understanding, the instinct to know, to make the world intelligible, and to render the world meaningful pertains to the core of the human being; it is thus an 'anthropological constant.' Myth is an early expression of this instinct by humans of ancient times. Through myth, the human being grasps and comprehends the world as a totality, as a coherent system of connections (Husserl 1970a, 282ff.), with a symbolic nature that follows symbolic rules. Within his phenomenology of cognition (*Erkenntnis*), which is particularly important to Husserl, myth plays a special role in the history of rationality. He held myth to be the most ancient and primitive form of rationality; he contended that myth is rational in its own way, and that it is the first step of a long journey towards modern theoretical rationality and, in the end, to phenomenology as such.

As mentioned above, Husserl agreed with Cassirer and Lévy-Bruhl that myth is not an entirely irrational mode of thought but that it has an inherent logic and rationality of its own. This logic and rationality is very concrete, deeply rooted

⁶ In a letter to Cassirer from April 3, 1925, Husserl writes: "*Seit einigen Wochen beschäftige ich mich oft und tief mit dem neuen Bande Ihrer Philosophie der symbolischen Formen [Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, 2. Teil: Das mythische Denken, Berlin 1925 – B. P. M.], den Sie so gütig waren mir vor einiger Zeit zukommen zu lassen*" (Husserl 1994b, 3ff.).

and bound up in the practical relationships and circumstances of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of ancient humans. Ancient myth, in its most archaic form, emerged from the closest surroundings of a pre-modern community as constituting their home-world (*Heimwelt*), and myth thus mirrored the particular relations of that world and community. The oldest and most concrete form of myth relates to and is born from *territory*. It is, as Husserl says, “*territorial myth*” (Husserl 1993, 43). This mythical world of ancient humans was very concrete; the most important “geographical” components were Earth and Heaven (Husserl 1993, 38; see also Moran & Steinacher 2008, 336f.). Ancient people perceived their world as essentially organic and living; their world-view was, according to Husserl, fundamentally animistic. Mythical worldviews, in their earliest appearances, could be conceived as “*universal animism*” (Husserl 1993, 4, 38, 44).

Myth, in its own way, offers a rational explanation of the world, mostly through symbolic structures and forms; its purpose is thus to explain the entire world in its totality (see Husserl 1970a, 283ff.). Husserl emphasizes that the particular contents and beliefs of a specific mythical worldview could be and should be interpreted with respect to the praxis of the lifeworld of its ancient community of origin (ibid., 285).⁷ According to Husserl, every tribe and nation has its own “world-mythos” (*Weltmythos*), which refers to the specific territorial myth of the tribe or nation in question (Husserl 1993, 43). When different tribes and divergent cultures would meet, they could opt either for peaceful communication or aggression. Through communication, reasoning, and the development of thought, myth became *more universal and abstract*. The evolution of myth thus lays the foundations of the birth of *religion*. Slowly and gradually, myth indeed turned into religion.

The main difference between myth and religion, for Husserl, is that the latter represents a higher level of human thought – more abstract and rational than myth. Religion uses abstract and formal concepts, attempting to explain the world

⁷ “It is understandable that this mythical-practical world-view and world-knowledge can give rise to much knowledge of the factual world, the world as known through scientific experience, that can later be used scientifically. But within their own framework of meaning this world-view and world-knowledge are and remain mythical and practical, and it is a mistake, a falsification of their sense, for those raised in the scientific ways of thinking created in Greece and developed in the modern period to speak of Indian and Chinese philosophy and science (astronomy, mathematics), i.e., to interpret India, Babylonia, China, in a European way” (Husserl 1970, 284f.).

in a more formal, systematic, and methodologically conscious manner than myth (Husserl 1988, 102ff.). Theology, which can be found in every developed form of religion, is already a kind of *theoretical thought* (ibid.). In this context, the path from *polytheism to monotheism* is an extremely important step for Husserl. For him, in monotheism, the motifs of idealization and unification are crucial, as they are also essential elements in *science*. In his view, the idea of “the only God” is expressed by those monotheistic motifs, and is only made possible through them (Husserl 1970a, 288f.).⁸ With the emergence of universal, formal, and rational thought, which is based on the concept of ideality, in Husserl’s opinion, we are on the verge of rational and abstract sciences. According to Husserl, the cognitive function of myth is, in the end, to give a unitary and universal explanation of the world, and all the events which are happening in it – although myth does this at a very premature stage of reflection.

2.2 The Role of Myth in the Constitution of Cultural Identity

As mentioned above, self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) is a central notion of Husserl’s later philosophy. Especially in the 1930s, he believed that our embodied being can be proved to be an *a priori* apodictic necessity – that mundane bodily existence is a necessary structural implication⁹ of the self-constitution of

⁸ “An outstanding case of this is religion. From this I would exclude the polytheistic religions. Gods in the plural, mythical powers of every sort, are objects of the surrounding world having the same reality as animals and men. In the concept of God, the singular is essential. Proper to it, from the human standpoint, is the fact that God’s ontic validity and his value-validity are experienced as an absolute internal bond. The next step here is the coalescence of this absoluteness with that of philosophical ideality. In the general process of idealization, which proceeds from philosophy, God is logicized, so to speak; indeed, he becomes the bearer of the absolute logos” (Husserl 1970a, 288).

⁹ According to Husserl, the ego and egological subjectivity has several layers. The deepest level is the pure or formal ego which is an abstract pole of acts and experiences. The personal ego is a higher and more concrete level. In Husserl’s view, the deepest level of subjectivity is the formal, empty, and pure ego-pole, which learns to conceive or interpret itself as a personal subject. The transcendental ego as pure ego pole also starts to ‘grow’ personality, which implies embodiment, intersubjectivity, relatedness to a world, and engagement in worldly activities. Husserl characterizes such structural implications of the transcendental development of the ego with terms like ‘mundanization’ or

transcendental subjectivity (e.g., Husserl 2008, 251–258).¹⁰ According to Husserl, my physical and biological being is a “threatened” or “endangered existence” (*bedrohte Existenz*) (Husserl 1973, 510, 601). If I do not want to die, I continually have to take care of my physical and biological being. However, connected with my physical and bodily existence, I also have a cultural existence and identity embedded in the cultural history of the world. My physical self-preservation founds self-preservation at a higher level, which is of crucial importance for the late Husserl. This higher-level self-preservation is cultural or spiritual (*geistig*), directed to the maintenance or preservation of my *cultural identity* and existence (see Husserl 1970a, 274f.; 1973, 92f., 149, 352f., 366f., 378, 388, 410, 413, 421f., 518ff.; 1993, 10f., 37–40, 77f., 258f.; 2008, 286f., 292, 315f., 458, 521, 531, 533; 2014, 169–176, 338ff., 360–382, 487–490).¹¹ In this sense, myth constitutes the collective and cultural identity of ancient people. At the lower levels of self-constitution, the ego constitutes itself as a biological and physical being and its self-preservation manifests itself through instinct. At higher levels, however, the ego also constitutes itself as a member of an intersubjective community, with its own particular culture and history, and the constitution of the ego’s self-identity is bound up with the culture of this particular community to which the ego belongs. Through the constitution of its concrete intersubjective community, the ego constitutes its cultural or ‘spiritual’ (*geistige*) identity; self-preservation relating to this higher level is directed at sustaining and preserving this cultural and spiritual identity. In the earliest stages of human history, myth and religion explained not only the fundamental nature of the world, but also disclosed the *position* of human beings in the world. In fact, myth provided an explanation

‘self-mundanization’ of the ego or the monadic ego. All this is an eidetic and genetic phenomenological necessity.

¹⁰ In brief, Husserl thought that self-constitution and world-constitution have a necessary structural connection. One cannot be thought or imagined without the other. Husserl argued that world-constitution is an *a priori* structural implication of the transcendental subjectivity and the eidetic essence of the ego. The annihilation of a peculiar world-nexus (e.g., awakening from a dream) could be imagined only by implementing or validating a new world-nexus or world-horizon; according to Husserl such an annihilation cannot be conceived otherwise, for example just by imagining that the older world-nexus was replaced by a new one.

¹¹ For more on Husserl’s concept of self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*), see also Lee (1993, 168ff., 193–197, 211ff.).

to ancient people as to how they came to be who they were, and in this way, myth also fundamentally contributed to the constitution of individual cultural self-identity.¹² In other words, in the earliest stages of human history, a person might conceive and interpret himself or herself as a member of a cultural community, the culture of which was fundamentally shaped and determined by a particular mythology or religion.

Following Husserl's statements on myth and mythology (Husserl 1993, 38–46), we might also say that myth, as a total explanation of the world, must take the form of a narrative (see also Husserl 1973, 145, 180; Steinbock 1995, 177, 198, 213–219, 242f.). Myth offers a total universal narrative about the origin of the world, its order, and its laws. Such a story renders the ancient person, their position in the cosmos, their destiny, and their life explicitly meaningful. Myth – just like religion – played a fundamental role in the life of ancient individuals and communities. Myth afforded values, projects, goals, and functions to one's life; it made individual and collective life meaningful. The ancient person in the pre-modern times was essentially embedded in their community; they had collective or group-identity which was fundamentally formed by meaning and value conveyed through myth.¹³ The meaning of life was connected to the existence of the group. Particular meaning was disclosed by myth to ancient individuals and communities about their position in the cosmos, their task in life overall, and fundamental norms of activities and human interactions. This overall meaning was thus essentially practical (Husserl 1970, 283), governing the individual and collective praxis and decision-making, and thus this meaning fundamentally determined the collective existence of a community. Myth disclosed *the ultimate truth* concerning the reality and meaning of life and, for the members of the group in question, this truth was the essence of their collective existence. So this truth did not only have

¹² For more on this, see also Steinbock (1995, especially 187–199). Anthony Steinbock closely examines the connections between narrative, historicity, generativity and ancient myth from a Husserlian point of view in this book.

¹³ This much is clear according to social-historical studies of ancient human history. This role of myth in meaning-constitution also, however, necessarily follows from Husserl's work on the intersubjective (intersubjectively bound) self-constitution of the transcendental ego as a personal ego in a historical-cultural community, as well as his discussion of history as a process of rationalization and development of rational and responsible independence and individual autonomy (Husserl 1970a; 1973; 1993).

a cognitive function (offering a total explanation of the world), but it also had a deeply practical function, in that it governed the lives of individuals and communities and their cultural-spiritual self-identity. In this context, if anything threatened this coherent meaning afforded by myth, taken as truth, then the members of the group interpreted this as a threat to their very existence.

The preservation of mythical truth and its transmittance from generation to generation among ancient people was a question of *self-preservation* in the higher sense. When an ancient tribe met another group whose myths conflicted with their own *allegedly ultimate and universal truth*, they felt that their very existence was being questioned and challenged. In such a case, there were three possible courses of action to be taken: 1) to *fight* (defending cultural self-identity, or to aggressively colonize the identity of the other), 2) to pursue *non-violent*, but non-communicative, quasi-tolerant *coexistence* with the other tribes, or 3) to attempt relatively or entirely peaceful *communication*. If a certain ancient group or tribe opted for this third course of action – in this context, primarily communication between tribes, and also intra-group communication – then this exchange of information could make it possible to achieve a higher level of cultural and/or spiritual identity, abstraction, and universality in each group's mythical and religious concepts.¹⁴ When tribes and communities encountered other tribes and communities with different mythologies and worldview, these encounters prompted certain community members to question their original beliefs, and even to question foundational elements of their original worldview and cultural heritage. This process of self-reflection enabled these community members to articulate a more rational and independent attitude, which enabled them to make more radical, effective, and methodologically conscious efforts in the pursuit of truth concerning the ultimate nature of the world and reality. In other words, such intercultural discourses prompted the systematic questioning of archaic beliefs and the suspension of their validity, ultimately laying the foundations of a theoretical attitude and a sort of *epoché*, which – according to Husserl – paved the path towards to science (Husserl 1970a, 282–286).

¹⁴ In my interpretation these statements are direct consequences of Husserl's hypothetical reconstructions on the assumptive beginnings of human history from a phenomenological perspective. One could logically derive the above-mentioned options from Husserl's considerations (e.g., Husserl 1993, 38–46, 53–59).

3 Cassirer on Symbolic World-Constitution¹⁵

In most cases, Husserl's considerations on myth and mythical worldviews were very general and based on his overall philosophical stance. Problems concerning mythology and ancient religion were particularly significant for him. His scholarly focus was on studying the cognitive development of mankind. As already mentioned, he had a thorough knowledge of pre-modern culture, mythology, and religion, but he rarely went into details within his analyses concerning this topic. Cassirer, on the other hand, was not only thoroughly familiar with the subject – indeed, his knowledge met the highest academic standards of the time – but he also offered systematic investigations into the lives and world-views of ancient and pre-modern societies.

Symbolism, as mentioned above, was key to Cassirer's understanding of human culture and history. In his interpretation, the symbol expresses a unity of the sensible and spiritual, mediating between the spheres of sensibility and meaning.¹⁶ Language thus represents the most general form of symbolism. In Cassirer's view, language is presupposed in every other symbolic form and system; it is, so to say, a *conditio sine qua non* for all higher-order symbolic formations, which are in turn independent from each other. Cassirer always emphasized that the various cultural achievements, cultural systems in general, and the entire worldview of a specific community are always fundamentally determined by language itself; he often argued that all human thought and activity is essentially linguistic. However, Cassirer also held that our ways of thinking are not only determined by linguistic and symbolic structures, but also by the concrete collective *praxis*, i.e., *the way of life* of a community. He analyzed many different cultures and communities to demonstrate the significance of their linguistic, symbolic, and practical cultural accomplishments, to show how this theory works in practice (Cassirer 1980; cf. also Cassirer 1954, especially 142–176).

Regarding the world of mythos, Cassirer's account of the mythical mind was more 'egalitarian' than Husserl's. Cassirer clearly tended to treat the main forms

¹⁵ In this part of the chapter, I draw a lot from Mezei (1984).

¹⁶ In the symbol "we have attempted to encompass the totality of those phenomena in which the sensuous is in any way filled with meaning, in which a sensuous content, while preserving the mode of its existence and facticity, represents a particularization and embodiment, a manifestation and incarnation of a meaning" (Cassirer 1957, 93).

of culture such as religion, art, philosophy, or science on the same level. Although he considers science to be the ultimate and, in a sense, highest manifestation of the mind, he also emphasizes the inherent value and independent character of every other intellectual sphere. This precisely prevents us from subordinating these spheres to science and, in the final analysis, from underestimating them. He thus carries out an analysis of myth and mythical consciousness, demonstrating its particular characteristics, structures, and norms. Myth is particularly important in Cassirer's philosophy of culture; it serves as a starting point for evolution and history of culture, forming a stage of human culture on which every special field of thought and action is inseparably connected. It is the innermost *entanglement* of every such field.

Just like Husserl, Cassirer also maintained that myth is not irrational per se. On the contrary, myth has its own logic and rationality which are different from modern logic and reason. However, according to Cassirer, myth and mythical thought are still logical and rational in the wider sense (Cassirer 1946, 3–49, especially 3–22). Moreover, Cassirer, just like Husserl, underlined the *totalizing tendency* of myth – i.e., its tendency to grasp reality as one coherent unity – as one of its most important characteristics. In what follows, we will take a closer look at Cassirer's interpretation of myth as a unity of ancient thought and practice and the particular rationality of myth.

3.1 The Emotive Unity of the Mythical World

According to both Cassirer and Husserl, myth grasps the world as a totality. For Cassirer, mythical thought understands the world as a complex coherent *unity* of concrete and intimately entangled *relations*. The sources of this coherence and unity in the case of myth are *feelings and emotions* (Cassirer 1946, 37).¹⁷ For Cassirer, this affective and emotional character belongs to the fundamental structure of mythical worldviews and attitudes; ultimately, this character constitutes the coherence and unity of the world (Cassirer 1954, 101ff., 108). Law, norms, and

¹⁷ “In all human activities and in all forms of human culture we find a ‘unity in the manifold.’ Art gives us a unity of intuition; science gives us a unity of thought; religion and myth give us a unity of feeling” (ibid.).

connections within the unity of the cosmos were understood to be essentially of a *symbolic nature*.

Such symbolic laws, norms, and relationships were first established for pre-modern subjects by their feelings and emotions. In Cassirer's account of mythical thought, all worldly phenomena appear through a veil of moods and emotions, and the mythical world as a totality also has a certain affective atmosphere, which in turn influences every concrete experience and event in the life of an individual. According to Cassirer, the sphere of emotions is inseparable from myth and religion (Cassirer 1946, 23–49). A further decisive aspect of mythical worldviews is that the strict and rigid borders between subjective inner life and external reality are purely imaginary. Subjectivity and objectivity figure in myth as a barely differentiated *fusion* or as a strong unity or intertwinement (Cassirer 1955, 48, 51).

As mentioned above, the trajectory of cultural history for Cassirer – as for Husserl – corresponds to the development of thinking from concrete to abstract (Cassirer 1980, 177–197; see Freudenthal 2004, 209). This tendency pertains also to the historical progress from myth to religion. All thoughts, action, and relations are closely intertwined in myth, which, according to Cassirer, represents the first awakening of the human spirit. It is the total *way of life* that constitutes a total world-view and a mythic conception of the world through emotion. Each single element determines the others at the same time, and therefore the whole overall. Any change to a particular way of life alters the particular mythical view of the world that corresponds to it.

The most important characteristic of the ancient worldview, for Cassirer, is the *universality of feeling*. According to him, each particular act of perception, thought, or physical activity is accompanied by a certain feeling or emotion, and such emotions color the entire experience of the world. The deeper symbolic meaning of those events, their hidden symbolic connections, the significance of each life event, and the significance of these events in relation to the wider world are all disclosed and illuminated through feelings. Meaning and logic in the mythical worldview are constituted emotionally. The feelings of anger, pain, hope, love, joy, and fear, etc. determined the entire actual givenness of the world. What appears as joyful, painful, lovely, fearsome, or hateful would appear to be such in an *objective* manner. This means that what appears as joyful, painful, lovely etc. does not do so by accident, but that our emotions towards the thing in question are evoked by its very nature. The value or axiological character of the thing, which is disclosed

by our feelings and emotions, figures as an intrinsic feature of this thing (Cassirer 1954, 102f.). The ancient person can barely differentiate between their inner world, their feelings, and the objective ‘outside’ world.

3.2 The Practical Unity of the Mythical World

Myth, as a total account of the world for ancient humans, stemmed directly from the concrete practical relationships and actions of the community in question. Moreover, myth took shape in partial response to the *body* or *bodily existence*. According to Cassirer, the body serves as the absolute point of orientation.¹⁸ Distinctions concerning place and space are constituted with respect to an ‘inner’ locus. These distinctions begin with a perceptual reference to the body, and they are predominantly related to bodily existence.¹⁹ Traces of this bodily influence can be found in Manding languages (from West Africa), for example, in which “behind” also translates as “back” or “rear end,” “in front of” also translates as “eye,” “on” also translates as “neck,” and “in” also translates as “belly,” etc. (Cassirer 1980, 207). Similar equivocal meaning can be found in many ancient languages; spatial expressions and names for places refer back to the different parts of the body, which is the point of origin for every action. In this way, the body also had a core function in the articulation and formation of the mythical worldview.

The practical context for ancient mythical understanding can be illustrated in a remarkably tangible way with *numerals*. The words denoting numerals were intimately bound up with the practical relations and circumstances of the particular ancient community in question. Numerals in the very same language, denoting the same quantity (5, 10, 100, etc.), *differed from each other* depending on the type

¹⁸ In this regard there is further similarity between Cassirer and Husserl, since the body also serves as a zero-point of orientation for Husserl (see Husserl 1952, 56, 158ff., 161ff.).

¹⁹ “At first local distinctions are closely linked with specific material distinctions – and it is eminently the differentiation of the parts of his own body that serves man as a basis for all other spatial specifications. Once he has formed a distinct representation of his own body, once he has apprehended it as a self-enclosed and intrinsically articulated organism, it becomes, as it were, a model according to which he constructs the world as a whole” (Cassirer 1980, 206).

of object for which they were used.²⁰ Words used to express numbers, according to Cassirer, referred less to objective attributes of the objects, and instead they were directives and instructions to the *operations of counting*. One of Cassirer's examples for this is taken from Sotho, which is a Southern Bantu language. Cassirer writes: "In Sotho, for example, the word for 'five' means literally 'complete the hand,' that for 'six' means 'jump,' i.e., jump to the other hand" (Cassirer 1980, 230).

The mythical worldview can also be exemplified, according to Cassirer, through *mythical ideas of causality*. Any connection whatsoever in space or time was regarded as a basis or reason for causal explanation. The idea of causality in mythic thought was specific, individual, and anthropomorphic. For ancient people, causal connections were governed by symbolic laws and supernatural (magical, divine, or demonic) forces. The mythical mentality offered some reason for everything; anything without a cause was nonsensical (cf. Cassirer 1955, 42–59).

The mythical worldview can be observed in certain *mythical topographies* – that is, the division of space according to mythical thinking. The meaning of every direction and region of space is bound up with certain locations, inhabitants, and laws. For instance, the direction 'up' is associated with 'heaven' as the realm of the superior, divine beings, whereas 'down' has connotations with 'hell' as the inferior, infernal, and more chaotic dimension populated by demon-like beings. 'Right' can be connected to cosmic and creative tendencies, structures, and qualities, while 'left' can be taken as the source of destructive, dark, and chaotic forces. 'East' is taken as the source of light, life, and joy, the dwelling-place of heavenly creatures and peoples. 'West' is associated with the realm of darkness, the underworld, and strange creatures (see Cassirer 1955, 98f.; 2013, 23ff.).

For Cassirer, myth represents an archaic state of mind from the beginning of human history. Later in history, however, human thinking develops and gets differentiated in an abstract manner. As one of the upshots of this process, *myth becomes religion*. According to Cassirer, the main difference between myth and religion is that religion is more abstract and rational, expressing a more differentiated stage of human thinking than myth. In other words, it is a higher level of cultural consciousness. Cassirer understood notions of the external and internal

²⁰ "In the language of the Fiji Islands, for example, different words are used to designate groups of two, ten, a hundred, a thousand coconuts, or a group of ten canoes, ten fish, etc." (Cassirer 1980, 233).

as separated from each other in religion. Divine forces became more abstract in religion than in mythical animism and totemism, for example. Furthermore, *abstract ideals* emerged within the religious attitude, which had not been conceived in mythical thought, such as ethical ideals (e.g., the figure of the religious saint) and God as the ideal of ultimate perfection, omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness in the monotheistic religions. In Cassirer's understanding of religion, ethical and moral functions are key, in that religions give the norms and rules of collective and individual agency. In cultural history, and in the history of religions in particular, these norms and rules became distanced from the narrative foundation and legitimation of social and ethical norms which had been a characteristic feature of myths (i.e., particular rules and norms are good because the *gods said so*). Rules and norms became good and valid because they were understood to be intrinsically so, by their very nature, and these rules and norms expressed the objective moral order of the world. In Cassirer's view, during the process of cultural history, and with the differentiation of symbolic form and the rapid development of modern sciences, *religion becomes reduced to its ethical content and function* (see Cassirer 1954, 123f.).

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave an overview of Husserl's and Cassirer's accounts of mythical consciousness and mythical worldviews. In my view, combining these two approaches can serve to inform contemporary research concerning mythical thought and pre-modern humans. Husserl's and Cassirer's reflections on myth offer scope for a more general and synthetic theoretical framework, as well as a more sophisticated methodology for understanding the mythical lifeworld and worldview of ancient people, for tapping into the deeper meaning of ideas and concepts pertaining to myth. This theoretical framework would unify the advantages of the first-person (phenomenological) and third-person approaches to mythical mind and culture in a methodologically refined way.

From the Husserlian methodological point of view, the egological emphasis of descriptions is of fundamental importance. The egological perspective is also methodologically crucial to the "principle of all principles," according to which we should endeavor to secure all possible intuitive evidence for our thoughts,

assumptions and theories, and, in the absence of direct intuitive givenness, to find a way to formulate a legitimate phenomenological reconstruction of the intuitive correlates for our unfulfilled meanings (*Meinungen*) (Husserl 1983, 44). Applied to the present context, this means that the phenomenologist should carefully reconstruct, for the purposes of study, a possible world-experience of pre-modern people as relating to myth, including her or his way of life and thought. Husserl's interpretation of myth highlights two points: (1) the totalizing character of myth enables the ancient subject to grasp reality as a coherent totality in a *narrative* manner (revealing its cognitive function); (2) myth plays a constitutive role with respect to cultural and collective identity (hence, the practical role of myth). The latter is strongly connected to Husserl's idea of self-preservation, particularly in relation to cultural identity. According to Husserl, myth, together with religion, had the fundamental function of making individual and collective life meaningful, affording meaning to the world and to ancient people's lives.

By contrast, the most crucial aspect of Cassirer's understanding of myth is the notion of *symbolism*. For Cassirer, myth is one of the greatest symbolic forms in human history and, at the same time, it is a starting point in historical development. It is a less differentiated form of human thought, in which every single element and moment is understood to influence the others. Cassirer, as we have seen, remarks that all cultural formations in general, and myth in particular, are *determined by language*, which is the most universal form of symbolic systems. Just like Husserl, he highlights the totalizing tendency of myth, demonstrates in a detailed and enlightening manner how mythical meanings and connections intertwined with each other in the totality of the complete systematic mythology. He also underlines the *practical context* of mythical views and concepts. On the other hand, Cassirer's perspective on myth differs from Husserl's. He employs a third-person approach to myths – an 'external' investigation of them – and undertakes a rich and profound comparative analysis of the different mythical formations and worldviews.

I propose a single unified account of myth and mythological consciousness from these two directions of inquiry. In my opinion, these two approaches complement each other rather elegantly. Cassirer's nuanced symbolic, linguistic, and psychological descriptions of myth take up the third-person perspective – that is to say, an intersubjective account of mythology and religion. Husserl's *a priori*

intentional approach, which has an egological point of departure and orientation, on the other hand, could be regarded as a first-person perspective account. The combination of these two approaches would result, in my interpretation, in an essentially phenomenological theory of mythical consciousness, which could be effectively and fruitfully used in contemporary research to understand the essence of mythical consciousness, as well as its structures and fundamental modes of functioning. I believe that such a synthetic theory could contribute to contemporary comparative mythology and religious studies – as exemplified by researchers like Wendy Doniger, Jaan Puhvel, Michael Witzel, or Robert Wright, just to mention a few. It is not the task of this present paper, however, to present a concrete application of this synthetic theory; in this study, I only wanted to explore certain elements which could be employed in such a synthesis of Husserl's and Cassirer's thoughts on myth. The synthesis itself would require a further study, as well as an examination of its concrete application on materials from cultural anthropology, comparative mythology, and religion.

Perhaps the most important insight made by these two authors in their research on myth is this: it is evidently essential for human beings to experience in a meaningful way and to give meaning to things, to the world, and to their own existence. Myth is the ancient human activity of meaning-bestowal. Both Husserl's and Cassirer's considerations on this topic illuminate essential features of myth and mythical consciousness. I believe that both the Husserlian phenomenological method and Cassirer's cultural and intercultural analyses regarding myths still hold underappreciated potential; the careful combination of these two theories could yet yield a significant contribution to contemporary research on comparative mythology and religions. The elaboration of such implications will be, however, the task of another study.

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The Use of the Term ‘Expression’ in Husserl and Cassirer

An Attempt at a Comparison¹

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Abstract: This paper offers a comparative analysis of the use of the term ‘expression’ in Husserl’s and Cassirer’s writings, showing that both philosophers relate this term in a similar way to the terms ‘sign’ and ‘meaning’ and determine the double character of the linguistic sign analogously. At the same time, the analysis brings to light that Cassirer does not show such a close relation between expression, meaning and object as Husserl does. Another difference emerges in the treatment of non-verbal expressions and their possible meaning-intending and meaning-fulfilling performances. In contrast, with regard to the problem of expression, both seem to understand the concept of symbol again in an analogical sense, namely as a sensuous sign expressing a mental, ideal meaning, even if its descriptive fulfilment and its relation to experiential immediacy are accentuated differently.

Keywords: Expression, Language, Logic, Sign, Meaning, Object

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1 The Problem of Expression in Husserl and Cassirer – A Preliminary Remark

Much has already been thought and written down about the philosophical problem of expression, which was introduced into the discourse – at the latest – by Leibniz and which became a topical issue for philosophy through Dilthey, among others (see Meuter 2006; Herrera Castillo 2019). The role of expression in Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has also been intensively explored (see Möckel 2018a). In contrast, phenomenologists do not seem to have devoted much attention to the concept of expression in Husserl. An early recipient is Gustav Špet (1994; see Möckel 2016c), but individual investigations (e.g., Sinigaglia 1998) have also been launched in later times.

In view of the almost inexhaustible problem of expression in philosophy, the task of the present contribution is a rather modest one: not the use and thus the function of the concept of expression in the philosophies of Husserl and Cassirer are to be analyzed and compared, but only that in one of the works of each; works which, with some justification, permit a comparative study of the use of the concept, since they are at least devoted to overlapping themes. As an aspect that does not determine the content of the analysis and comparison, but rather inspires it, it may be assumed that Husserl was familiar with a whole series of Cassirer's writings, which Cassirer sent him regularly, and that Cassirer also followed Husserl's publications closely (see Möckel 2016b).

By the two works I mean, first, the study "Expression and Meaning" published by Husserl in 1901 (2nd ed. 1913) as the first of six *Logical Investigations*. Although it is understood as an investigation in the field of logic, it also repeatedly touches on questions of the philosophy of language and linguistics. What Husserl has in mind here is the concept of linguistic expression, which is connected with the sign; to which, in substance, Cassirer also ties in the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* published in 1923. The volume, which bears the title *Toward a Phenomenology of the Linguistic Form* and whose chapters 2 to 5 contain the term 'expression' in their headings, is again conceived as a philosophy of language and has as its main subject the 'linguistic formation of concepts [and classes].' For its part, however, it also repeatedly touches on the relationship between language and logic.

"The problem of concept [and class] formation," Cassirer states, "designates the closest point of contact between logic and the philosophy of language; at this point, they seem to merge into an inseparable unity." (Cassirer 2021a, 247) Cassirer, however, insists on a fundamental demarcation of linguistic concept formation as the historically and systematically original one, from the logical concept formation based on it – a distinction which is not shared by most logicians of the time, with the exception of Hermann Lotze.² "Logic," Cassirer critically remarks in this context,

[...] tends to locate the actual birthplace of the concept in certain intellectual operations, particularly in the process of "defining" according to *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*, erecting a sharp demarcation and a clear fixing of the significative content [*Bedeutungsgehalts*] of words. However, in order to arrive at the ultimate source of the concept, thinking must return to a deeper stratum, and it must seek the motives of connection and separation that prove themselves effective in the process of word formation and that are decisive for the subordination of all the material of the representations under certain linguistic class concepts. (Ibid., 250; trans. mod.)

And this means the specific laws of the linguistic concept and class formation taking place in the imaginative material.

In contrast to the concepts of logic, "[l]inguistic concepts always stand on the border between action and reflection," in them "there is no mere classification and ordering of intuitions according to certain objective characteristic traits" (ibid., 255). Cassirer finds the "genuine mystery of [linguistic, C. M.] 'predication'" in the fact that the "primary forming" which takes place within language "forms the foundation for all of the subsequent and more-complex syntheses of logical thinking" (ibid., 249). The main topic of the first volume of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is therefore the search for an explanation for "the original form of concept formation that prevails in language" (ibid., 252), rather than the elucidation of the mode of concept formation presupposed in logic.

² "We have reported Lotze's theory of the 'first universal' [*erste Allgemeine*] at length, because, correctly understood and interpreted, it may provide the key to an understanding of the original form of concept formation that prevails in language." (Ibid., 252)

He recognizes the typical feature of this linguistic form of concept formation, which appeals to the linguistic researcher, in “a purely ‘qualifying’ apprehension” as found, among others, in the “language of natural peoples” (ibid., 259). In logic, on the other hand, as in “our developed cultural languages” prevail the “‘generalizing’ apprehension, in which [language] progresses from the sensible-concrete to the generic-general” (ibid.).

Linguistic concept formation as such does not yet know a ‘genetic definition’ of the concept as used by logic, but it prepares the ground for it. Therefore, and only therefore, according to Cassirer, “the linguistic expression of concepts” are ultimately appreciated as “logical questions” (ibid., 265). The “linguistic expression” thus possesses, as every “truly independent foundational function of spirit” its specific “forms and laws of expression” (ibid., 122f.), with respect to its logical expression. This insight, or thesis, may be understood as an important theoretical consequence of his original philosophy of symbol and culture, which Cassirer develops after 1910 to further ground his ‘General Epistemological Criticism,’ initially oriented towards the natural sciences, and which he now also calls ‘Extended General Epistemology’ (Möckel 2018b, 446, 448).

Analysis and comparison of the concept of ‘expression’ in both texts, which are ultimately quite different, thus prove to be difficult. And this not only because of the different weight given to language or logic in each of them, or because of the very different methods used in them (descriptive ↔ reconstructive composition). For it quickly becomes apparent that for the analysis a methodological restriction of the use of terms to ‘linguistic expressions’ as ‘signs’ has to be made, since the *First Logical Investigation* is mainly about these. In later elaborations such as *Ideas I* (1913), *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) or *Experience and Judgment* (1938), Husserl repeatedly turned to the problem of expression, extracting other or new aspects from it.

Thus, from § 124 of *Ideas I* onwards, “the parallelism of noesis and noema” is applied to the “talk of expression and meaning,” linking to “the familiar distinction between the sensory [...] side of the expression and its non-sensory, ‘spiritual’ side” (Husserl 2014, 245). Whereas in the *First Logical Investigation* the words ‘expression’ and ‘meaning’ had “relation only to the linguistic sphere, to that of ‘expressing’” (ibid.), Husserl now extends their application “to the entire noetic-noematic sphere, thus to all acts, regardless of whether they are interwoven or not with acts of expressing” (ibid.). Here, the term ‘meaning’ remains limited to linguistic

expressions, to the “*meaning that ‘expresses’*” while the term ‘sense’ is used “with the more encompassing scope in mind” (ibid.).³ In the ‘Preparatory Considerations’ of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl examines in § 2 the ‘ideality of language,’ i.e., of speech, from the perspective of the word meanings of *logos* (speaking, thinking, and what is thought). Here he emphasizes once again the distinction between the word “as a sensuous, specifically [...] acoustic, phenomenon” and its one unique “language-composition” (Husserl 1969, 19f.). The “verbal formations [...] as sense-filled locutions” are regarded by him as “concrete unities of verbal body and expressed sense” (ibid., 21). The logician is interested in language but “solely in its ideality” (ibid.). The logician, however, is interested in language only “in its ideality” (ibid.). In § 3, Husserl considers “language as an expression of ‘thinking,’” whereby for him “thinking” is considered “in the broadest sense, as the sense-constituting mental process,” i.e. as “meaning” (ibid., 22f.).⁴ The restriction or specification of the terms ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ introduced in *Ideas I* seems to play a role here insofar as, for Husserl, from the “universality of the coincidence between speech and thinking” emerges “two parallel realms, [...] the realm of possible verbal expressions [...] and the realm of possible senses” (ibid. 24).

The concept of expression plays once again a major role in the ‘Introduction’ to *Experience and Judgment*. In § 12 Husserl writes that in the case of cultural objects, we would have to do with “the expression of mental being-sense” (Husserl 1973, 55). Husserl distinguishes here, among other things, pure “sensuous perception” of a human being from the “perception of what is perceptible only by means of the understanding of an expression” (ibid. 55) of this being, that is to say “his being in the doing of this or that; in turning-toward, [...] and so on – to the extent

³ “The sound-of-the-word can only be called an expression because the meaning pertaining to it expresses something; the expressing lies originally in the meaning. ‘Expression’ is a remarkable form that can adapt to every ‘sense’ (the noematic ‘core’) and elevate it into the realm of the ‘Logos,’ the *conceptual* and, with that, the *universal*.” (Husserl 2014, 246)

⁴ Meaning is the process in which “the meaning – that is the signification, the sense, expressed in the locution [...] is constituted for the speaking subject” (Husserl 1969, 23). “[T]hinking includes every mental process appertaining in this fashion to the chief function of the expression (namely, to express something) and going on simultaneously with speaking: that is to say, every mental process in which the sense that is to become expressed becomes constituted in the manner peculiar to consciousness – the sense that, if it does become expressed, is called the signification of the expression” (ibid., 24f.).

that all this attains expression” (ibid., 56). This second concept of perception could well be related to Cassirer’s “perception of expression” (Cassirer 2011a, 185, 197). In order “to attain the truly ultimate and original self-evidence of prepredicative experience,” which is Husserl’s intention with this work, one has to go back from the well-founded perception of expressions to the simplest sensuous perception, and thereby leaving “all expression out of play” (Husserl 1973, 56). A conclusion that Cassirer again does not share. Through this, according to Husserl, one would obtain “pure universal nature [...] as the ground of experience, passively given” (ibid.). But these later preoccupations cannot and should not be the subject of the present paper.

We also find a much broader recourse to the concept of expression in Cassirer’s philosophy as a whole, which is only mentioned here, but will not be thematized. Besides the analysis of (1) linguistic expressions as signs, to which we will largely confine ourselves in the following, Cassirer (2) also adopts the concept of immediate, also pre- or non-linguistic movements of ‘expression’ or ‘experiences of expression,’ which was brought forward by the philosophy of life in confrontation with the discursive character of conceptual thinking and cognition. Dilthey (1981, 253) speaks, among other things, of “expressions of experience,” which Cassirer productively applies to the historically early and systematically elementary stage of language development. In his late philosophy, he will base the type of “cultural studies” on this concept of expression, which will be further developed into the concept of an original “perception of expression” (Cassirer 1999, 168). Arguably not unimpressed by the concept of an objectification of life-manifestations formulated in Dilthey’s 1910 work *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (Dilthey 2002, 169f.), which “appear in the world of the sense, but express something spiritual” (ibid., 205), Cassirer (3) develops a general theory of expression of human spirit, of each “independent foundational function of spirit” (Cassirer 2021a, 124). This general theory of spiritual forms of expression considers language, myth, art and scientific thinking as specific modes of expression of the mind, which is why Cassirer speaks of linguistic, mythical and artistic expression, among others.

Let us now turn to the analysis of what Husserl and Cassirer tell us about linguistic expressions as signs that carry meaning. It soon becomes evident that both the phenomenologist and the philosopher of symbols, as well as the linguist Nikolay Trubetskoya few years later, connect the problem of linguistic expression

as a sign with that of the expressed mental, ideal meaning (Trubetskoy 1977; see Möckel 2022b).

2 Linguistic Expressions and their Meanings

2.1 Physical Sign and Mental Meaning

In his *First Logical Investigation* “Expression and Meaning” Husserl distinguishes the ‘genuine’ expressions from the ‘spurious’ ones proper of the indicative signs (Husserl 2001, 183f.), i.e., the “indicative” or “signifying” (ibid., 189; trans. mod.) function of signs, since only proper expressions manifests a significative function or the process of “signifying” and a proper “meaning” expressed by a (word-)sign. In other words, for Husserl “an expression’s meaning [...] cannot coincide with its signifying function.” (Ibid., 190; trans. mod.) Therefore, in our analysis, we do not pursue ‘non-genuine’ expressions, i.e., signs or the indicating function of signs, even though under the point of view of their “signifying function” ultimately “all expressions in communicative speech function [also, C. M.] as indications,” that is, as “signs of the ‘thoughts’ of the speaker, i.e. of his sense-giving inner experiences” (ibid., 189). We limit ourselves here to the ‘meaningful signs’ or expressions.

Husserl describes the connection between expression, sign, and meaning in what follows, according to my thesis, quite similarly to Cassirer later in the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Both emphasize the material, sensorial character of the linguistic sign, which functions as a carrier of a mental, ideal meaning. Moreover, both reject a psychologistic and sensualistic interpretation of this connection, or the attempt to base “the ‘sense’ or the ‘meaning’ of expressions” associatively on what Husserl calls a “certain sequence of mental states” (ibid., 188). The way according to which Husserl differentiates the meaning of a linguistic expression or sign from the “word as a mere sound-pattern” (ibid., 190), namely that the “complex, intimately unified experience of the sense-filled expression” breaks up “into the two factors of word and sense” (ibid., 191), returns in Cassirer, as will be shown, in a similar fashion. Descriptively, Husserl finds in the “concrete phenomenon of the sense informed expression,” on the one hand, what he has presented as the “expression itself” namely the “physical phenomenon,” the

sound pattern or the word mark, briefly the “physical side of the expression” and, on the other hand, at the same time “what [the expressions] express as their meaning or sense,” that is, what Husserl ‘understands’ as “the acts which give it meaning and [...] in which its relation to an expressed object is constituted” (ibid., 191f.).

Here, apart from expression and meaning, a third crucial concept is introduced by Husserl, that of the ‘object’: “Each expression not merely says something, but says it of something: it not only has a meaning, but refers to certain objects.” (Ibid., 197) More than that, “an expression only refers to an objective correlate because it means something.” In other words, “it can be rightly said to signify or name the object through its meaning.” (Ibid., 198) That for Husserl the object and the meaning of an expression are not the same becomes evident, among other things, when he introduces the topic of the “act of meaning,” i.e., the actual experience of meaning in which we are not conscious of the “meaning as an object” (ibid., 232). When we perform this act and we ‘live’ in it, according to Husserl, “we naturally refer to its object and not to its meaning” (ibid.).

Cassirer, for his part, also develops his own theory of signs in the section entitled “Introduction and the Framing of the Problem” of the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, although it is difficult to separate the theory of signs and the theory of symbols in his work. He emphasizes more strongly the interweaving of both aspects distinguished above when he speaks of the physical sound. As “a sound heard” it is, however, “a part of the sensible reality,” so that in the phonetic sign a “inward energy” in “something outward” objectifies itself (Cassirer 2021a, 22). Cassirer’s philosophical credo is basically stated in the conclusion that “the sign is no mere accidental cloak of thought but rather its necessary and essential organ” which does not only “serve for the communication of an already-finished given product” (ibid., 15f.). “[T]he ideal form becomes known only in and through the ensemble of the sensible signs that serve it for its expression” (ibid.), since the spirit cannot obtain any “fulfillment” outside this “interrelation and correlation [...] between the sensible and the spiritual” (ibid., 17).

With regard to the concept of object, through which Husserl expands the relations between the concepts of expression and meaning, it can be stated that Cassirer also resorts to the conceptual distinction between meaning and object in relation to linguistic expressions, for example, when he states that “[i]n each one of its freely projected signs, spirit apprehends the ‘object’ by apprehending at the same time itself and the proper lawfulness of its own act of forming [*Bilden*].”

(Ibid., 23) However, he does not find such an inner relation between meaning and object of expression as Husserl does. On the other hand, he puts emphasis on the fact that linguistic “manifestations” always serve for “the expression of the relation between the individual elements [*Einzelelemente*]” and they “structure and nuance this relation in a variety of ways” (ibid., 279). The differently shaped “relationship between ‘relation’ and ‘signification’ [...] within one and the same type [of language]” (ibid., 281) is regarded by him as an opposition between “formal expression of relations” and “material expression of relations,” both of which find themselves in a “unstable equilibrium” (ibid.).

Husserl, by contrast, provides a further conceptual clarification of his concept of expression when he states that, for its meaningfulness as “sense informed expression,” it is indifferent whether the ideal “meaning intention” is intuitively fulfilled in relation to the object or remains empty, as “meaning fulfilling acts” are not essential to the expression (Husserl 2001, 192). Cassirer can follow this thesis only conditionally, since for him the ideal whole of meaning is ‘revealed’ directly, i.e. intuitively, in the individual perception: “If we take away from perception this character of [immediate, C. M.] ‘revelation’ [of the whole of meaning] – then it would indeed cease to mean anything for us – then it sinks down to the abstraction of a mere state of affairs within us” (Cassirer 2011a, 8; trans. is mine). However, he is also primarily interested in how the “spiritual energies” (Cassirer 2021a, 9) transform the “passive world of mere *impressions* [...] into a world of pure spiritual *expression*” (ibid., 10). This succeeds, for example, in the “process of linguistic formation,” which shows “how the chaos of immediate impressions is illuminated and organized [*gegliedert*: articulated] for us only in that we ‘name’ it and so permeate it with the function of linguistic thinking and expression” (ibid., 18). In this way “the articulated [physical, C. M.] sound” is raised “to the expression of thought” (ibid., 254). The problem of meaning fulfillment does not seem to arise here.

Let us explore the relationship between sign and meaning in the linguistic experience of expression a little more deeply. Husserl further describes it as follows, taking up the concept of function: “The function of a [physical-sensible, C. M.] word” and of linguistic signs in general is “to awaken a sense-conferring act in ourselves” and “to point to what is intended,” objects or meanings, in order “to guide our interest exclusively in this direction.” (Husserl 2001, 193) An idea that recurs in modified form in Cassirer. Thereby, Husserl continues, the object of the

sensible “sign phenomenon” (ibid.) undergoes a modification, since here “an act of meaning” is constituted “which finds support in the verbal presentation’s intuitive content [of the word sign, C. M.], but which differs in essence from the intuitive intention directed upon the word itself” (ibid., 194). The “meaning intention” constituted in this way “characteristically marks off an expression from empty ‘sound of words’” (ibid.). We also find this observation in a somewhat revised form in Cassirer’s work.

Cassirer sees the function of the speech sound or word sign in the fact that “the fixing of certain [sensory, C. M.] elements of content” performed here gives to these elements “a determinate-spiritual quality” by virtue of which “they are now raised above the mere immediacy of so-called sensible qualities” (Cassirer 2021a, 18). Regarding the question “how [...] a certain sensible individual content can be made into the bearer of a general spiritual ‘signification’” (ibid., 24), Cassirer answers similarly to Husserl: the linguistic “signs” with their “physical constitution” make up the sensible “basic elements [*Grundelemente*],” while they “acquire[] a new and multifaceted spiritual life” (ibid.) through the way they are viewed – which means, in Husserl’s terms, through sense-conferring acts. This way “the physical sound” transforms itself into “a speech-sound,” which makes it “the expression of the finest intellectual and emotional differences [*Differenzen*]” (ibid., 24f.). What the sensible bearer is, “immediately completely recedes behind what it mediately accomplishes and ‘means’ [*besagt*],” namely “to make present not only itself but, at the same time, another content not immediately given but given only through its mediation” (ibid., 39f.) – i.e., an ideal. This is ultimately made possible by the relational character of all individual contents of consciousness, by their ability to point to other contents which allows “certain formations [*Gebilde*]” to embody “the pure form of pointing” (ibid., 39) from which their “peculiar dual nature” results: “their dependence on the sensible, however, also includes in itself a freedom from the sensible.” (Ibid.)

In Cassirer’s work, however, there is also an idea that I had not noticed in my reading of Husserl, but which is essential for Cassirer’s concept of philosophy: according to this insight, “the individual sensible” elements “do not stand by themselves” in the sense-giving activities “rather, they are integrated into a conscious whole, from which they receive their qualitative [meaningful, C. M.] sense” (ibid., 25). Consequently, he formulates here the insight according to which with “every single existence [*Sein*] of consciousness” always “at the same time, the whole of

consciousness is in some form co-positd and represented" (ibid., 30), hence the individual is to be understood as an expression of the whole: a fact that he calls "the originary function of representation [*Repräsentation*]" (ibid., 31). This entails "the presentation of an element of consciousness in and through another" (ibid., 33). In this context Cassirer leads a polemic against the relying on "pure intuition" as, in his view, the philosophers of life do (ibid., 46); a polemic, however, which, in my opinion, does not address the phenomenological concept of intuition. Cassirer also insists on a "basic function of signifying itself" (ibid., 39) considered as an "originary phenomenon" arguably also called the "the basic function of the sign-bestowing" (ibid., 40), which is "already present and effective [*vorhanden und wirksam*] before the positing of individual signs" (ibid.). Here I am not sure to what extent this is compatible with Husserl's conception of the acts of signifying.

2.2 Expression, Meaning, and Object as Ideal Unities

The "expressed content" is described by Husserl, on the one hand, as "content in a subjective [i.e., descriptive-psychological, empirical-real, C. M.] sense and, on the other hand, as "content in an objective [i.e., logical, ideal, C. M.] sense". In the latter case, a distinction must be made between the "content as intending sense, or as sense," "the content as fulfilling sense," and "the content as object" (Husserl 2001, 200).

Whereas §§ 1–10 deals with the "the real relation of [several, C. M.] acts" and experiences, the investigation from § 11 onward performs a "turn [...] to the ideal relation of their objects or contents." (Ibid., 195) What is "given" in these acts, that is "the expression itself, its sense and its objective correlate" (ibid.) are thus described as ideal unities which remains identical to themselves. Thus, the expression as "sound-pattern uttered here and now (*hic et nunc*)" no longer enjoys special attention, since it is now directed at the "the expression *in specie*" (ibid.), the "identically the same" in all utterances (ibid., 197). This phenomenologically compelling 'turn' again makes the comparison with Cassirer's position difficult, since the latter deals exclusively with functions, activities of the mind and ideational performances, but not – or hardly – with 'ideal entities.'

Cassirer conceives of the sign in the same functional way as Husserl when he notes that "every linguistic expression [...] contains in itself [...] a determinate

independent character of sense-bestowing” that consists in “the singling out of determinate ‘pregnant’ elements,” which constitutes “the real force of the sign” (Cassirer 2021a, 41f.). The sign consequently creates “a mediation for the transition from the mere ‘matter’ of consciousness to its spiritual ‘form’” (ibid., 42f.), whereby the use of signs removes the consciousness from sensible perception (ibid., 281).

Cassirer can certainly agree with Husserl’s statement that the “concept of meaning or meaning-intention” is “essential to an expression as such” and that must be distinguished “from a merely sounded [physical, C. M.] word” (Husserl 2001, 206). Cassirer can also agree with the thesis derived from it, according to which a “meaningless expression” as opposed to an ‘objectless’ expression that cannot be ‘fulfilled’ “is no expression at all,” but only a word-like sound-pattern, such as ‘Abracadabra’ (ibid., 201). The situation is different, on the other hand, with regard to Husserl’s claim that “the essence of an expression lies solely in its meaning” (ibid., 199), which he uses as “synonymous with ‘sense’” but not in the subjective, empirical acts of signifying (ibid., 201). According to Cassirer’s symbol-philosophical view, these acts already contain an inherent intellectual performance – the primordial phenomenal function of meaning and representation. Perhaps Husserl’s claim that the content expressed by the “expression” is to be described both “in the objective” and “in the subjective sense” (ibid., 200) could be interpreted with Cassirer in such a way that the individual experience of expression must first prove itself to be universally valid, and consequently that it also has ideational universality.

In Cassirer’s work we also find the thought that language, with all its links to the world of the sensory and imaginative, clearly “reveals a tendency and force toward the logical-universal” (Cassirer 2021a, 273), which is why “the epistemo-critical consideration” of language inevitably leads to “conceptual thinking, and from there further to logical judgment” (ibid., 277). It remains questionable, however, whether this consideration can be equated with the ideality of meaning asserted by Husserl (2001, 83). I do not go further here into the analysis of expressions “whose meaning shifts” (ibid., 216) which Husserl distinguishes from the “objective expressions” that are “theoretical expressions,” of which “the proofs and theories of sciences” are made up (ibid., 218; trans. mod.). In Cassirer’s analysis of language, I do not find this aspect. What is decisive here is probably Husserl’s insight that “variations in meanings” are due to “variations in the act of meaning” (ibid., 222f.) and that this does not affect the character of meanings as “ideal units” (ibid., 224), which “pure logic” alone has to deal with (ibid., 226).

Cassirer seems to prefer to Husserlian expressions like “being in itself,” “truths in themselves,” etc. (ibid., 95), the notion of the spiritual, ideal character of meaning, as many passages prove; for example, when he states that the “process of linguistic formation” foreruns “that intellectual labor that is further expressed” in the formation of scientific concepts (Cassirer 2021a, 18). The linguistic sign, which allows “the constant flux of the contents of consciousness,” has “a certain ideal signification that endures as such” (Cassirer 2021a, 20). Husserl’s statement that meanings contain “ideal unities, expressed through manifold expressions, and thought of in manifold act-experiences” (Husserl 2001, 224), could be agreed upon by Cassirer insofar as an ideal meaning transcends any empirical, sensory single fact. Presumably, Cassirer can even endorse Husserl’s conclusion regarding the “objective researcher” (ibid., 225), according to which the meant, intended, and apprehended meaning of a proposition is “the same thing, whether I think and exist or not, and whether or not there are any thinking persons and acts” (ibid., 230).

However, Cassirer might no longer follow Husserl’s thesis that the “objective researcher” is uniquely interested “in the concepts, which are for him ideal unities of meaning” as well as “the truths, which themselves are made up out of such concepts,” while not being “interested in understanding” the expressions (ibid., 225). The philosopher of symbols, following Dilthey, shows independent ways of understanding precisely in the manifold symbolic forms of intellectual culture. In contrast, it seems to me that because of his fundamental adherence to Kant’s ‘Copernican turn,’ as a result of which he places in the centre of the consideration the process of spiritual *formation*, and not the ideal *form*, Cassirer agrees with Husserl’s statement that the researcher “does not *make* the objective validity of thoughts [...] of concepts and truths,” and their “ideal being,” rather he “sees” and “discovers” them (ibid., 226), but solely under the condition that the acts of seeing and discovering are understood as active-operative, constructive acts.

Husserl’s statement, discussed in § 35, according to which there is “no intrinsic connection between the ideal unities which in fact operate as meanings, and the signs to which they are tied, i.e. through which they become real in human mental life” is also thematized by Cassirer several times, and this in specific connection with “analogical” and especially for “symbolic” linguistic expressions (ibid., 233). However, the formerly “concrete, sensible-objective expression” or “substantial expression” transformed into a “general expressive relationship,” as well as the “linguistic designation of pure concepts of relation” resulting at the end of this process

of reconfiguration as “expression[s] of a categorial form of determination” or as “pure relational expression[s],” probably cannot be equated with Husserl’s expressions of meaning as ideal unities (Cassirer 2021a, 281).

For Cassirer, even the “general expression of relation” (for instance, the copula) reveals “the same reciprocal determination of the sensible through the spiritual, the spiritual through the sensible” (ibid., 291). At this point, he emphasizes once again that sense and meaning are not simply added to the sensory-physical word-sign, that the “intellectual expression would not have been able to develop through and out of sensibleness if it had not originally been contained in it [...]; if not [...] even the sensible designation did not already embrace an act of ‘reflection,’ a basic act of ‘mindfulness’ in itself.” (Ibid., 291f.) It seems to me that this fact is not so clearly formulated in Husserl.

2.3 Non-verbal Expression

If Husserl wants to limit “expression” to speech, parts of speech and “each sign that is [...] of the same sort” while at the same time excluding “facial expression and the various gestures which involuntarily accompany speech without communicative intent” (Husserl 2001, 187), then there seems to be little room for “gesture language” as a form of “[l]anguage as expressive movement,” which Cassirer deals with in the second section of his book (Cassirer 2021a, 123ff.). Nor does Husserl pay particular attention to non-verbal expressions in the *First Logical Investigation*. For him, speech-accompanying “facial expression” and “various gestures” are indeed considered “utterances” and consequently “expressions,” but not “in the sense in which a case of speech is,” because they are lacking any mental “intention” and “meaning” (Husserl 2001, 188). The comparison with Cassirer’s position is terminologically complicated by the fact that Husserl also calls such “involuntary utterances” “expressive movements” that are interpretable by fellow human beings and “consequently ‘mean’ something for them,” but nevertheless “they are without meaning in the special sense in which verbal signs have meaning: they only mean in the sense of indicating” (ibid.).

Cassirer, in contrast, deals in detail with the early stages of language formation in the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, in which the “sound of excitement and emotion” is dominant as subjective “expression of the inner” and the

sound of imitation as an objective expression of “the external” (Cassirer 2021a, 23). Here, “psychic content and its sensible expression” still seem “set into one” (ibid., 124). The “mimetic [expressive, C. M.] movement” proves to show “an immediate unity of the ‘inward’ and ‘outward,’ the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘bodily,’” whereby already at this early stage the sensory “signifies” and “means” something other but directly present in itself” (ibid., 125). I have doubts whether Husserl speaks of a ‘present in itself.’ The “form of [mimic, C. M.] expression” (ibid., 126) in which, according to Cassirer, “the affect and its utterance” are given “in one and the same temporally undivided act” (ibid., 125f.), already contains the “first sign” of “higher spiritual spontaneity” (ibid., 126). By way of generalization, Cassirer explains that “every elementary expressive movement forms an initial demarcation of spiritual development, insofar as it is still entirely situated in the immediacy of sensible life and yet, at the same time, goes beyond it” (ibid.). Cassirer exemplifies this in connection with “gesture language,” in which he also discerns “a first approach toward the higher functions of signification as they emerge in language and thinking” (ibid., 128).

In phonetic language, on the other hand, in the “development of the structured sound” (ibid., 132), the spiritual “function of representation [...] emerges [...] in a new spiritual actuality when for the gesture it uses the *sounds* as the means and as the sensible substrate.” (Ibid., 130) The historical-systematic succession of stages of mimic, analogical, and symbolic expression in the structure of the linguistic form introduced by Cassirer in this context is known to be replaced later, with recourse to Karl Bühler (1923), by the systematics of expressive, representational, and pure signifying function (Cassirer 2021b, 15ff., 139ff.). These three stages can be classified as onomatopoeia, the “expression of a pure relation” (ibid., 139), and the “the general and universally valid function of ‘signification’” (ibid., 143).

2.4 Expression, Sign, Symbol

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Husserl, in connection with the problem of expression, also uses the term symbol in a more or less analogous way to Cassirer, namely as a sensory sign with mental meaning (see Möckel 2018c). However, “symbolic” for Husserl basically excludes the descriptive fulfilment of meaning, whereas Cassirer distinguishes the descriptive level of perception as the “lowest

level of [...] symbol formation” and the non-descriptive mental level of achievements of symbolization as “higher mental forms of the symbol” (Cassirer 2011a, 45; see Möckel 2018d, 579ff.). It must also be mentioned that Husserl was deeply concerned with the symbolic character of mathematical signs in his early writings, for instance in *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891) (Husserl 2003).

In the *First Logical Investigation*, the problem of symbols is introduced with the statement, contained in § 17, that the understanding of an expression is bound neither to “mental pictures” nor to fulfilling “illustrations,” since its “meaning” remains unaffected by either (Husserl 2001, 206f.). ‘Understanding’ is here identified – in Kant’s sense – with ‘thinking’ and distinguished from ‘cognizing.’ Such expressions function, according to Husserl, as “symbols” which, like signs that already carry meaning, appear as a “meaningful word” that simultaneously shows “sensuous character” (ibid., 209). Consequently, we would not be dealing with the “mere symbol,” i.e., with the “mere word, as a sense-complex,” but with the purely mental understanding as a “peculiar act-experience relating to the expression [...] that it shines through the expression, that it lends it meaning and thereby a relation to objects” (ibid., 208f.).

Husserl repeats what has already been said when he states with regard to the symbol that “meaning” or the “characteristic function of the expressive sign” fundamentally presupposes a physical-sensory “sign whose function it is” (ibid., 214), in other words, when he explains that “meaning” as “act character” presupposes “an act of intuitive presentation as its necessary foundation” (ibid.). Cassirer seems to follow Husserl’s explication from 1901 with his definitions of the symbol as “expression of something ‘spiritual’ through sensory ‘signs’ and ‘images’” (Cassirer 2013, 75) or as a concept that encompasses

[...] the totality [*Ganze*] of those phenomena in which generally the sensible [*Sinnlichen*] presents itself as always a special case of “sense fulfillment” [*Sinnerfüllung*] – in which something sensible [*Sinnlichen*], in the manner of its existence [*Dasein*] and its being-a-certain-way [*Sosein*], presents itself at the same time as the particularization and embodiment, as the manifestation [*Ausprägung*] and incarnation of a sense [*Sinn*]. (Cassirer 2021b, 105)

In understanding the symbol, Husserl continues, we refer solely to “the thing designated,” but not to “the sign as a sensible object” (Husserl 2001, 209). The meaning

of the expression lies solely in this “sense-giving act” performed by means of symbol or sign, without “representative imagery” (ibid.). The question now is whether the statement that “purely symbolic thinking” proves that a linguistic “expression should be able to function significantly without illustrative intuition,” given that “the meaning-aspect of symbols” does not lie “in intuition,” is compatible with Cassirer’s concept of “symbolic pregnance,” developed in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, according to which “a lived-perceptive-experience, as a ‘sensible’ lived-experience, contains in itself at the same time a certain non-intuitive ‘sense’ and brings it to immediate concrete presentation” (Cassirer 2021b, 239; see Möckel 2018d). The answer to the question, which at first must be in the negative, is, however, only ‘half’ the answer, if we think of the above-mentioned “higher mental forms of the symbol” (Cassirer 2011a, 45).

Husserl’s “interpretation of symbolic thinking” (Husserl 2001, 210) is thus based on a “non-intuitive” and yet “symbolic thought” (ibid., 211), which operates “without recourse to more than symbolic presentations” in which “our interest” is not “directed to the signs themselves” but lives rather “in the consciousness of meaning” and “of understanding” (ibid., 210). Consequently, symbols are for Husserl “meaningful [purely mentally understood, C. M.] signs” (ibid.), but by no means mere “physical signs bereft of all meaning” (ibid., 211). The statement that the “meaning of a [symbolic] sign” takes place in the “understanding grasp” or in the “understanding and [...] interpretation” (ibid., 213) can also be followed unquestioningly by Cassirer.

Husserl’s reflections concerning the connection between “expressions functioning purely symbolically” and “corresponding intuition” (ibid., 211) seem to thematize a cardinaly different problem than Cassirer’s concept of symbolic pregnance, which is devoted to the meaning of sensory acts of perception, namely that of the “higher mental forms of the symbol.” In § 23 follow the considerations regarding an “expression understood” without “given life by intuitive illustrations” (ibid., 214), whose accomplished “first conception” of the “mere sign” as “complex of sensations” builds a second conception “which goes entirely beyond the experienced sense-material,” in particular a new “object” “meant in an act of meaning” which “is not presented in sensation” (ibid.). This does not seem to form a dissent to Cassirer’s notion of higher spiritual forms of the symbol.

Cassirer, who in the “Introduction and the Framing of the Problem” to *Language* from 1923 introduces the concept of symbol in direct confrontation with

picture-theories of cognition, describes scientific concepts with “symbolic character,” with reference to Heinrich Hertz, as “self-created intellectual symbols” (Cassirer 2021a, 3). These concepts, conceived as symbols “and ‘signs,’” resemble “the articulated word of a language in that it is, in itself, significant, meaningful, and ordered according to fixed rules.” (Ibid., 15) The sensory signs representing them – like the articulated words of a language – receive their meaning through their “general logical place” within a system of signs created by “a pure activity of the spirit” (ibid., 19).

These “symbolic expressions” or “symbolic signs” on the highest level of linguistic concept formation, i.e., scientific concepts, completely merge, according to Cassirer, “purely and completely into the function of signifying” without being in need of the direct “stimulus” – or ‘founding’ – by means of the sensible individual directly given in perception (Cassirer 2021a, 40). Thus, for example, mathematical signs appear as pure symbolic expressions “without its own sensible mass [...], [floating, C. M.] in a pure ether of signification” (ibid., 43), of the “symbolic, the merely significative [*Signifikative*]” (ibid., 46). With them, language finally emerges “from the sensory covering in which it has hitherto appeared” (ibid., 143). However, even these symbols require arbitrarily created “concrete-sensible contents [which means signs, C. M.] as an expression for a determinate complex of signification.” (Ibid., 40) This means that a residue of something sensory and consequently intuitive is also indispensable here, what again Husserl had also emphasized (Husserl 2001, 211).

3 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the two selected writings of Husserl and Cassirer, which pursue the problem of expression as linguistic expression in differently weighted relations between contemporary philosophy of language and logic, has brought to light a number of arguments in support of the thesis formulated at the outset, according to which both philosophers determine the relation between expression, sign, and meaning in a similar, comparable way. Both emphasize both the material, sensory character of the linguistic sign, which functions as the carrier of a meaning interpreted as mental-ideal, and they explicate the notion of meaning-intention in an analogous way. Basically, Cassirer himself explicitly

states this at least once, in particular when in a literature review from 1927 he explicitly endorses the characterization of the expressive sign in contrast to the sign as indication (Cassirer 2004, 43f.), as it is developed in the *First Logical Investigation* (Husserl 2001, 181f.).

One of the divergent aspects of the otherwise largely analogous determination of the relation between expression, sign and meaning is that Cassirer does not find such an inner relation between meaning and object of expression as Husserl does. Since Cassirer also examines linguistic expression at the level of immediacy of experience, he is not likely to regard meaning-fulfilling acts as fundamentally extra-essential, as Husserl does. Non-verbal expressions are also evaluated differently by the two philosophers with regard to their possible symbolizing power. Contrary to Husserl's fixation on ideal entities, Cassirer seems more interested in ideational functions and formations. Both share the observation that a tendency towards the logical-general is realized in language, which is reflected in the abstract sign language of science. And finally, with regard to the problem of expression, they also use the term symbol in a more or less analogous sense, namely as a sensory sign with mental meaning, even if with regard to its intuitive fulfilment and its relation to the immediacy of experience, different accentuations can again be noticed.

Translated from the German by Thiemo Breyer

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Experience in the Light of Humanistic Ideals

Philosophical and Strategic Similarities Between Edmund Husserl and Ernst Cassirer

MARTINA PLÜMACHER

Abstract: This paper explains Husserl's and Cassirer's pleas for a humanistic understanding of human experience defended and profiled against naturalistic misconceptions. Husserl as well as Cassirer point out that having experiences always already requires intellectual activity, in a twofold sense: on the one hand, in grasping contexts of phenomena and, on the other hand, with regard to possibilities of shaping oneself, one's relationship to other people and the environment. In view of the fact that there are always opportunities for action, subjects are compelled to decide how they want to act and what they can take responsibility for. Consequently, Husserl and Cassirer also argue against positivism of any kind and defend ethical and political ideals against being discredited, which often occurs with reference to a reality that falls short of these ideals. Both Husserl and Cassirer stand for what could be called a humanism in difficult circumstances.

Keywords: Human Experience, Naturalism, Positivism, Humanism, Husserl, Cassirer

1 Introduction

Philosophical and strategic similarities between Edmund Husserl and Ernst Cassirer become particularly evident when we consider their arguments directed against naturalisms and positivisms. In these arguments, Husserl and Cassirer both defend an understanding of human experience which I would like to call humanistic, since it does not limit having experiences to the ascertainment of the factual. Rather, both Husserl and Cassirer accentuate experience as a determination and interpretation of facts with regard to possibilities of actively shaping one's own life, oneself, relationships with other people and the environment. Husserl profiled this understanding of human experience especially in his work *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936) against positivist and naturalist views, and in this context, he assigned the natural sciences an instrumental role in human life. He pleads against the deferral of responsibility for shaping life and culture to the sciences. Cassirer shares Husserl's assessment of the function and performance of the mathematical natural sciences. This can be demonstrated in a particularly clear manner with reference to *Substance and Function* (1910). Already in this early work, Cassirer argues that human experience of the world encompasses more than what scientific experience is able to make accessible. His agreement with Husserl's call to never abandon the freedom to decide how things should be changed for the better can be derived from the understanding of freedom that Cassirer formulates in various writings. Yet, it becomes especially obvious in an essay written by Cassirer in 1939 in Swedish exile under the shadow of National Socialism, which is just as striking a plea against positivism as that formulated by Husserl in the *Crisis*.

The philosophical and strategic similarities between Husserl and Cassirer also include the accentuation of the cardinal role of ideals in human life. Both regard ideals as basic orientation marks in experience as well as in the shaping of things, social conditions, ways of life and culture. Both Husserl and Cassirer defend ideals against a positivist devaluation that refers to a reality that falls short of the ideals.

The following exposition of these arguments against naturalisms and positivisms is divided into three parts. In the first part I explain Husserl's stance against naturalism and positivism in the *Crisis*. The second part is then devoted to the presentation of parallel arguments in Cassirer's *Substance and Function*. In the third, concluding part, I show, in accordance with Husserl and Cassirer and in contrast

to positivism, the indispensability of ideals for a thinking and doing that aspire to change human matters and relations for the better.

2 “Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people”

Husserl’s *Crisis* begins with a critique of positivism and scientism in contemporary culture. “Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people” (Husserl 1970, 6), so goes Husserl’s biting comment on the blind trust in positive sciences. For him, this blind trust marks a disturbed relationship to the sciences. Husserl attacks this understanding because it makes people indifferent to questions concerning the meaning, or meaninglessness, respectively, of human existence (ibid., 5f.). In a scientistic attitude, human beings lose sight of the fact that it is they themselves – and not the sciences on their behalf – who have to answer questions about how they want to live, what they can do and what they can be made responsible for. According to Husserl, questions about the meaning or meaninglessness of human existence concern “man as a free, self-determining being in his behavior toward the human and extra-human surrounding world and free in regard to his capacities for rational shaping himself and his surrounding world” (ibid., 6).

The human world does not only consist of ‘facts.’ For humans, the world is a space for action, which in its respective present contains possibilities for change and reconfiguration. It is necessary to become aware of these possibilities in order to then decide how one wants to act and what one can answer to. Sciences can be consulted in the process of decision making. However, the decision must be made by us as persons – with regard to our own lives as well as the lives of our fellow human beings and other living beings.

Husserl’s *Crisis* is a broad reconstruction of developments in the history of philosophy and the sciences since the Renaissance. One aim of this reconstruction is to expose those approaches that lead to blind faith in the sciences and that obscure the fact that persons can conceive of themselves as free.

Husserl’s reconstruction of the genesis of scientism begins with the emergence of the mathematical natural sciences. According to his thesis, physics consistently and successfully implemented the ancient idea of understanding nature with the aid of mathematics. For this reason, physics rose to become the model for exact

natural sciences. Its methodical approach became independent, but the original purpose of mathematizing nature was forgotten. According to Husserl, this led to shifts of meaning that concealed the original intentions (*ibid.*, 58).

Husserl describes the shift of meaning caused by the “view of the world from the perspective of geometry” as particularly momentous – this view narrowed the focus to what “appears to the senses and is mathematizable, [...] *abstracts* from the subjects as persons leading a personal life, [...] from all that is in any way spiritual, from all cultural properties which are attached to things in human praxis” (*ibid.*, 60). In this abstraction, the world becomes thematic only as a complex of physical things. In the context of this abstraction, the dualism of the physical and the mental as formulated by Descartes emerged. This dualism splits the world into “two worlds” (*ibid.*): into a world of nature that consists only of physical things and processes; and into a mental world of animated subjects. In this way of thinking, however, the mental world remains dependent in so far as all animated subjects are related to nature (see *ibid.*, 61). The physicistic conception of nature then led, in English empiricism, to a “naturalization of the psychic” (*ibid.*, 63) as well as to a “naturalistic psychology” (*ibid.*, 67), which reduces human cognition to mechanisms of association.

Husserl identifies the naturalistic conviction that everything that exists is nature as the source of various irritations. In the form of physicalism (which understands nature as causally determined in its entirety) free human decisions and creativity become mysterious puzzles. This is a first irritation. A second irritation arises from the naturalistic conviction that only natural sciences (and above all physics) can find out and determine what is real. This conviction discredits lifeworldly experiences of reality, which are debased to mere subjective experiences of a sensory appearance (*ibid.*, 54). Husserl expresses the logical consequence of this approach as follows: “If the intuited world of our life is merely subjective, then all the truths of pre- and extra-scientific life which have to do with its factual being are deprived of value” (*ibid.*). A third irritation concerns the natural sciences itself. It emerges as soon as one considers that their objects are theoretical objects. The physical world, as Husserl puts it, is “a theoretical-logical substruction” (*ibid.*, 127) of the perceivable world. What we perceive are phenomena, not scientific laws. The objective is “in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable in its own proper being” (*ibid.*). As a result, even some scientists interpret this objective as something “metaphysically transcendent” (*ibid.*, 129). What is this transcendent that is itself

not perceivable? Can it be understood as an expression of the true, objective world? Can the models of the natural sciences, which are based on idealization, claim to symbolize real processes? This cannot be the case; after all, research is an unfinished process that involves changes in theory. Natural science is a “progression of hypotheses” (ibid., 42), Husserl emphasizes. Natural science claims to give us

[...] a better and better “representation” [*Vorstellung*] of what “true nature” is. But true nature does not lie in the infinite in the same way that a pure straight line does; even as an infinitely distant “pole” it is an *infinity of theories* and is thinkable only as verification; thus, it is related to an *infinite historical process of approximation*. (Ibid.; italics added)

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that with such considerations natural sciences lose authority. The question of how reality can be made accessible by means of idealizing models (using, for example, geometry) becomes highly puzzling under the premise of empiricist epistemology.

For this reason, Husserl sharply opposes the naturalization of human knowledge in British empiricism – especially Locke’s “data-sensualism” (ibid., 85; see also ibid., 232, 234f.) and Hume’s rendering of all “categories of objectivity” as “necessary idealizations of what is given intuitively” (ibid., 87; see also 221, 224) into “psychological fictions” (ibid., 67). Hume labelled categories such as identity, causality, and continuum, as well as geometric figures and mathematics, as mere fictions, as if there was nothing corresponding to them in perception. Husserl remarks: in empiricist scepticism “all knowledge of the world [...] is an enormous enigma” (ibid., 89). This naturalization of knowledge marks the “bankruptcy of objective knowledge” (ibid., 88) and the debasement of reason (ibid., 13).

Husserl’s phenomenological counterproposal undermines the sensualistic dualism of perception and thinking. He accentuates the fact that perception of things and processes involves an active, intellectual structuring of phenomena, as expressed, for example, in the distinction between the typical and the atypical, constancy and change, unity and multiplicity, identity and non-identity. Husserl stresses the extremely important point for human experience that phenomena are interpreted in terms of possible developments, possible actions, and possible consequences. Determining what is possible, impossible, probable, and necessary is essential for effective action. The categories and concepts, however, in whose light

people interpret phenomena, can neither be read directly from the phenomena themselves, nor do they arise from the phenomena due to psychological processes of association. Rather, as a means of understanding, they are cultural phenomena.

Husserl assesses the “intellectual accomplishment” of the natural sciences based on “mathematical idealizations” positively (ibid., 53, 43). It enables the “practically desired prediction of what is to be expected with empirical certainty” (ibid., 43; see also 50f., 65ff.). The successes of the natural sciences in this regard justify their methodological procedure. But Husserl clearly states that it is a misunderstanding of natural scientific theories to try and find in them the true being of nature itself (ibid., 43f.). The theories document the result of previous efforts to reveal connections in the phenomena of nature by means of scientific methods and procedures. According to Husserl, the fact that mathematical sciences uncover connections that remain occluded to pre- and extra-scientific experience (ibid., 42) does not justify the discrediting of pre- and extra-scientific world-experience. For scientific knowledge does not change the fact that things and processes are experienced in all their sensory qualities and in light of the formation of life processes.

Scientific knowledge influences everyday experience. For example, it allows us to interpret certain phenomena as signs of developments or points to possibilities of how new technologies, materials, and processes could be successfully developed. The view sharpened by science for possible developments and possibilities of acting and creating is at the same time a challenge, because there is an obligation in knowledge to act reasonably according to it, to reflect on ways of life and, if necessary, to change them for the better.

Yet sciences cannot relieve people from deciding which possibilities of acting and creating they want to take and which they do not, nor what they can be responsible for. Against scientism, Husserl argues for the freedom to set goals for oneself. For him, however, setting goals is not just an individual matter. In the *Crisis*, he emphasizes that experiences are evaluated communally (ibid., 163). In this sense, people share responsibility for how they want to shape their lifeworld. Their lifeworld is a shared world and this means: a world shared and experienced together with other persons, thus a cultural world (cf. ibid., 164). The communication about ways of shaping this world must not be consigned to the sciences. This is the deep meaning of Husserl’s emphasis on the lifeworld as the source of all sense-making and as the point of reference for answers to the question of which sense-making is valid (ibid., 124, 127f.).

3 An Orientation Towards Phenomena that is Appropriate to Human Beings

Cassirer also decisively rejects naturalistic conceptions of human experience that obscure the view of human freedom of decision and creativity. He accentuates above all the point that people order and interpret appearances, things, and events according to the perspectives, scales, and criteria that are important to them (cf. Cassirer 2006a, 145; 1944, 134). His philosophy of symbolic forms identifies language, images, and theories as media and instruments of human orientation in the world. Cassirer speaks insightfully of “image-worlds” and of “symbolic forms” in light of which people experience reality and shape their lives (Cassirer 2020, 7). He argues for a reflection on the manner of specific orientations, since such reflection is the precondition for being able to identify problematic orientations and to replace them by more efficient ones. This reflection is the prerequisite and basis of rational action.

Cassirer’s early treatise *Substance and Function* (1910) is already marked by this program. In my opinion, it is best suited for a comparison with Husserl’s *Crisis*. This is especially the case because in this book Cassirer pointedly elaborates the function and performance of the mathematical sciences against scientific and empiricistic misunderstandings and, just like Husserl, sharply rejects naturalistic conceptions of cognition.

The book begins with a critique of the naturalistic theory of concept formation (Cassirer 1953, ch. 1). According to this theory, concepts are formed primarily by two mental mechanisms: first, by the association of similar things, and second, by the fading of fine-grained distinctions in memory. This naturalistic theory cannot conclusively explain how concepts are formed that make sense to humans, nor does it capture the logical relationships between concepts, for example, the important relationship between the general and the particular. Cassirer highlights the point that the establishment of a similarity between two things is never without meaning, thus never without a specific point of view. Every comparison requires aspects that determine in which respect things appear similar, equal or dissimilar. This determination of aspects is based on human motives. It does not follow an abstract non-human nature. The fact, for example, that we do not use the word ‘dog’ for wolves illustrates this point well.

Moreover, Cassirer strongly emphasizes the logical relations between concepts. Naturalistic as well as psychologistic theories of concept formation fail to do justice to these relations. These theories cannot explain mathematical concepts or mathematics as a system. They also fail to explicate the relation between empirical concepts. The latter is the case because their idea that generalization is merely an abstraction from differences does not capture the relationship between the general and the particular. Not only are individual and particular conceived in terms of something general, but the general is also constantly re-examined and, if necessary, readjusted in its application to particulars. Generalization is a mental anticipation of the totality of possible cases. The question whether this anticipation is justified is decided in the application to individual cases, i.e., in experience.

Comparable to Husserl, Cassirer clarifies in *Substance and Function* the scepticism that arises as a result of empiricist epistemology. He lets contemporary mathematicians and natural scientists have their say, who were irritated by philosophical empiricism. The mathematician Paul DuBois-Reymond, for example, saw the sciences as characterized by two irreconcilable fundamental views: according to one view, which DuBois-Reymond calls 'idealism,' there exist intangible objects of mathematics (such as limits or irrational numbers). According to the other view, that of empiricism, however, only what is perceptible may be considered as existent (DuBois-Reymond 1882, 2f.). So, does natural science deal with things that do not exist or, if they exist, then in a way that is unperceivable?

Cassirer readjusts the confused situation in two respects. First, he attacks the idea of the real existence of mathematical objects. Mathematical concepts are ideas and not real objects (Cassirer 1953, 127f.). Second, he rejects the notion that human understanding of a connection in phenomena is reduced to the mere perception of connections (ibid., 129f.; see also 115f., 253). Natural sciences measure the world and make use of mathematics to reveal relations that remain hidden from pre- and extra-scientific experience. Geometric models and consequently also idealizations are used to form a picture of possible relationships for which evidence is then sought in experiments. With Heinrich Hertz, who discovered electromagnetic waves, Cassirer emphasizes the functional role of scientific models.¹ The models are used to think through relationships in order to then develop experiments

¹ Cassirer refers to Hertz's famous remarks on scientific work with models (see Hertz 1894, Introduction; Cassirer 1953, 179f.; 2021, 15).

with which the conclusions derived from the model can be tested for empirical adequacy.

The empiricist idea of a mere “description” of nature, as Cassirer complains, does not do justice to the study of nature using mathematics (Cassirer 1953, 115f., 122, 137f.). But effective as it is, this idea tempts sceptical reflection. Even renowned natural scientists fall under its spell. Cassirer quotes the chemist and Nobel Prize winner Wilhelm Ostwald, who states that all quantitative laws of the natural sciences “only hold exactly for the ideal case. We thus stand before the fact that many and among them the most important laws of nature are asserted and hold of conditions, *which in reality in general are never found.*” (Ostwald 1908, 55; as quoted in Cassirer 1953, 130). The meaning of natural science itself is thus questioned. Cassirer comments on Ostwald’s statement with the remark that “the relation between the theoretical and factual elements” (ibid.) of scientific knowledge has become a problem.

In the same way as Husserl, Cassirer rejects the idea that scientific theories articulate what exists objectively (ibid., 258f.). Cassirer characterizes formulas and models as “constructive schemata” (ibid., 186) and “general plans of our thought [*Orientierungspläne unseres Denkens*]” (ibid., 258). Referring to physics, he formulates: “We inscribe the data of experience in our constructive schema, and thus gain a picture of physical reality; but this picture always remains a plan, not a copy, and is thus always capable of change” (ibid., 186). We see here a parallel argumentation to Husserl’s characterization of natural science as a ‘progression of hypotheses’ in a historical process of an ever more precise approach to nature.

Moreover, Cassirer emphatically points out that the image the sciences create is shaped by their specific questions and methods. Hence, the image gives information only about specific aspects of reality, not about all of them. In no way, therefore, can the particular image of a science replace the other image of pre- and extra-scientific experience. With respect to the latter, there is agreement between Husserl and Cassirer. Cassirer explains: the sensory qualities of things (their odour, colour, sound, etc.) fall outside the world of pure forms of physics, but not outside nature (ibid., 274f.). None of the elements of sensation can be entirely negated by a scientific concept (ibid., 291). Nature, as experienced by humans, comprises more and different elements than what physics or other sciences present of it.

Cassirer emphasizes the importance of realizing the specific achievement of each science and determining the function of scientific knowledge for human life. But

this means answering questions such as: Why do we need scientific knowledge? When do we need it? Answering these questions creates orders of knowledge. In *Substance and Function*, Cassirer clarifies that we are generally good at relating different experiences and cognitions to one another. For example, we resort to instruments of temperature measurement (e.g., a clinical thermometer) when this seems important to us in certain contexts of action and we do not want to rely only on the temperature we feel. Technical temperature measurement in no way devalues the felt temperature impression. Cassirer argues that felt temperature is not subjective because it is determined by feeling. We objectively feel warmth or chilliness. Our knowledge of the dependence of our temperature feeling on certain circumstances (such as our instantaneous body temperature) causes us to classify the felt temperature as being subjective in relation to the measured one. We say that the measured value is (comparatively speaking) more ‘objective.’ According to Cassirer, the qualification of experiences and cognitions as subjective or objective is an expression of a “critical evaluation” (ibid., 274), which we perform when we put different experiences in relation to each other. Critical evaluation serves the “organization of experience” (ibid., 277).

The necessity of organizing experience is a theme that Cassirer takes up again in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, this time also including the different non-scientific ways of understanding reality. Cassirer promotes the insight that the different ways of experiencing reality and understanding it must not be opposed to each other, as both play an extremely important role in our human life. To understand this role is to become aware of how and when the different forms of knowledge help us to actively shape ourselves as well as the things and circumstances around us.

4 The Central Importance of Ideals in Human Life

Ideals are indispensable for human creative activity, even if ideals can never be fully achieved. With this argument, both Husserl and Cassirer oppose a positivism that seeks to discredit ideals by appealing to a positivistic reality.

“Pessimists and ‘political realists’” are attacked by Husserl in an essay he wrote for the Japanese journal *Kaizo* in 1923 – both would try to persuade us that the idea of a reasonable organization of our lifeworlds is hopeless. For both positions it is “already an unattainable ideal for the individual to shape his individual life into

a life of reason.” (Husserl 1989a, 4; hereafter, translations of this work are from the translator, T. B.) Even more so, it seems hopeless to them, as Husserl says, “to want to undertake such a thing for communal life, for national life, indeed for the life of the entire occidental humanity” (ibid.). Husserl’s disarming question is: “What would we say to a person who, for the sake of the unattainability of the ethical ideal, would abandon the ethical goal and not take up the ethical struggle?” (Ibid.) Husserl’s statement that “man as man has ideals” (Husserl 1989b, 35) is at the same time a call to profess these ideals, to stand up for them in a committed way, and to struggle with fellow human beings for ideals.

Ideals are the great orientation markers in thinking, acting, and creating. It is with regard to them that we distinguish between right and wrong. One thinks here of ideals in the production of artifacts, of ideals in cognition as well as of ideals in human coexistence and in the shaping of social institutions, of morality and law. Ideals transcend “the limits of the actual world” (Cassirer 2006a, 67; 1944, 60), Cassirer emphasizes. He points out that ethical and political ideas (such as Plato’s *Republic* or Thomas More’s *Utopia*) “exist at no moment of time and at no point in space” (Cassirer 2006a, 67; 1944, 61). Nevertheless, they demonstrate their power in shaping the modern world. “It follows from the very nature and character of ethical thought that it can never condescend to accept ‘the given.’ The ethical world is never given; it is forever in the making.” (Cassirer 2006a, 67; 1944, 61)

Husserl and Cassirer not only point to the orienting function of ideals. Both also characterize ideals as the source of human commitment to a better life. Husserl emphasizes that any critique of the present involves the belief that things can be made better. Thus, he writes,

If we subject our culture, that is, our humanity cultivating itself and its environment, to a judgment of condemnation, therein lies our belief in a ‘good’ humanity as an ideal possibility. Implicit in our judgment is the belief in a ‘true and genuine’ humanity, as an objectively valid idea, in the sense of which reforming factual culture must be the self-evident goal of our reform efforts. (Husserl 1989a, 10)

It is certainly no coincidence that Husserl, in his *Crisis* from 1935, directed against positivism at the time of the rise of National Socialism, so strongly emphasizes human freedom of “rationally shaping” (Husserl 1970, 6) oneself as well as the

environment. Cassirer also defended this human freedom against positivism in an essay published in Sweden in 1939 (Cassirer 2006b). He saw positivism embodied in three forms: 1) in the form of physicalism; 2) in the form of historical fatalism (represented, for example, by Oswald Spengler); and 3) in the form of Hegel's philosophy of history. Cassirer understands all three approaches as positivisms, since they question the freedom of personal decision. Physicalism assumes that all events are subject to general laws of nature and that there is no spontaneity of the ego that can break through these laws (Cassirer 2006b, 150). Spengler declares culture to be a mythical power to which individuals had to surrender (*ibid.*, 150f.). Hegel's philosophy of freedom, according to Cassirer, is not consistent. It formulates (according to Cassirer's by no means unproblematic view) the "process of liberation only for the infinite, only for the absolute subject, not for the finite subject [...]. The latter still remains strictly bound, for it is nothing other than a mere point of passage of world events" (*ibid.*, 151; trans. is from the translator, T. B.). Finally, in 1944, Cassirer recalls Immanuel Kant in his discussion of National Socialism:

Ethical freedom [...] is not a fact but a postulate. [...] it is not a gift with which human nature is endowed; it is rather a task, and the most arduous task that man can set himself. [...] Freedom is not a natural inheritance of man. In order to possess it we have to create it. (Cassirer 2007, 282f.; 1946, 287f.)

Translated from the German by Thiemo Breyer

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Appresentation and Symbolic Pregnance

The Constitution of Cultural Meaning in Husserl, Cassirer and Schutz¹

BENJAMIN STUCK

Abstract: The paper intends to draw a line between the Husserlian concept of ‘appresentation’ and Ernst Cassirer’s ‘symbolic pregnance,’ both of which denote a making present to consciousness of something originally absent that is re- or co-presented on the basis of something directly given. Regarding human cultural-ity, these concepts can be seen to have a central place in Cassirer’s and Husserl’s philosophy, as well as in the philosophy of culture. Whereas Husserl locates the fundamental dimensions of meaning constitution in culture by means of ‘concrete appresentation,’ the eminent significance of appresentation for culturality itself was shown by Alfred Schutz, who continued Husserl’s work especially with respect to the phenomenology of the lifeworld and the multi-layered character of cultural meaning in symbols. By bringing Cassirer, Husserl and Schutz together, the constitutive *intermingling* of cultural meaning in special regional worlds, which can be seen as based in ‘cogitative types’ (Husserl), in ‘provinces of meaning’ (Schutz), and/or in ‘symbolic forms’ (Cassirer), comes to light. Illuminating the relations between such forms was one of the aims Cassirer had set for a philosophy of culture.

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Keywords: Appresentation, Symbolic Pregnancy, Cultural Meaning, Provinces of Meaning, Cogitative Types

1 Introduction

According to Ernst Cassirer's *Logic of the Cultural Sciences* the philosophy of culture "wants to know [...] the *totality of the forms* in which human life takes place" (Cassirer 2000, 76). From this perspective his famous notion of the human being as an "*animal symbolicum*" (Cassirer 1945, 25ff.; 2000, 25), which anthropologically declares humans as cultural animals using symbols, points to the functionality of symbolic forms and of symbolization as the former's fundamental principle. In this view, the innermost "symbolic value" of culture is the "appearance of a 'meaning,' which is not detached from the physical but is embodied by it and in it" (ibid., 43). Regarding this "appearance of meaning," which is bound to and embodied by the physical, Cassirer had introduced the notion of "symbolic pregnancy" in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (see Cassirer 1970, ch. 5, 191–204). Insofar as the symbolic value "is the factor common to all those contents that we denote by the term *culture*" (Cassirer 2000, 43), we can say that symbolic pregnancy is a central dimension of cultural meaning constitution (see Köhnke 2000; Schwemmer 1997, 116–125; 2011, 108–112).

Even though Husserl is seldom regarded as a philosopher of culture, on closer inspection his œuvre reveals fruitful considerations on the topic of culture. As I shall argue in the following, Husserl's term 'appresentation' can be seen as comparable to Cassirer's notion of symbolic pregnancy. Although they belong to the different traditions of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology and Cassirerian philosophy of symbolic forms, I will trace these two concepts, which are closely related to the idea of symbolization and its importance for the constitution of cultural meaning. In this respect, I argue that we may gain further access not only to the process of symbolization itself but rather to the very interrelation of forms or 'schemes' – a task that Cassirer himself put at the top of the to-do list for a philosophy of culture, when he wrote that "it is the most important question of the philosophical endeavor to categorize the mutual relations of these symbolic forms" (Cassirer 2009a, 96; my translation) – or, as Ernst Wolfgang Orth (1996, 312) put it, "cogitative types." We will have to come back to this later.

In order to address precisely this task of the categorization of those mutual relations, we need to take a close look not just at Husserl's and/or Cassirer's philosophy, but also at the work of the Husserlian scholar Alfred Schutz (1899–1959). This is due to the fact that in his phenomenology of the lifeworld he was eminently concerned with the very *relational* character of the manifold intentional attitudes² or cognitive styles (and their correlative worlds or realities) as well as with appresentational relations. Schutz strictly differentiates the terms *type* and *cognitive style* (see Schutz 1990a and 1990b). Thus, I will uphold the distinction of *cogitative type* and *cognitive style*, in order to not cover up Husserl's term of cogitative type with Schutz' concept of type. But firstly, the general interrelation between symbolic pregnancy formation and appresentation is of interest to us.

2 Symbolic Pregnancy and Appresentation in Cassirer's and Husserl's Philosophy

In Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* we find some of his most systematic considerations of the concept of appresentation. Here, Husserl (1982, 109) exemplifies appresentation with regard to the constitution of others and the object-world as a "making present to consciousness a 'there too,' which nevertheless is not itself there." Each appresented or 'paired' element goes hand in hand with something directly given. For example, the consciousness of others is appresented with their presented body, as a modification of my own "system constitutive of my animate organism" (ibid., 118), including the modes of appearances as "if I was there" in accordance to my own conscious stream of consciousness (ibid., §§ 53f., 116–120). In the same way, Husserl would say, the rear part of an object is co-presented with its given front.

Unfortunately, in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Cassirer had only briefly outlined the meaning of symbolic pregnancy formation.³ According to him, sym-

² Regarding our topic, Srubar (2009) presented a comparative approach to Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and Schutz' 'early' *Theory of Life-Forms*, but skipped the term symbolic pregnancy and proceeded directly to appresentation.

³ Concerning this, Schwemmer (1997, 118) writes: "*Der Begriff der symbolischen Prägung ist in diesem Sinne kein Grundbegriff, sondern der – im gewissen Sinne nachgereichte – Titel für die theoretische Perspektive, in der Cassirer seine Analysen der*

bolic pregnancy means “the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain non-intuitive meaning which it immediately and concretely represents.” (Cassirer 1970, 202) Thus, on a general level we might say: similar to Cassirer’s pregnancy formation that ‘contains a certain non-intuitive meaning’ which is, in other words, not ‘itself there’ in the Husserlian sense, appresentation gives something ‘immediately’ and ‘concretely’ together with the directly given. Strictly speaking, within lived experience the co-presented element is phenomenally “there too” (Husserl 1982, 122), albeit the transcendental analysis had shown appresentation’s mediacy and, in the case of intersubjectivity, the appresented member, e.g., the consciousness of others *in toto*, as not fulfillable in originary presentation (ibid., § 52, 113–116).

Cassirer and Husserl differ strongly regarding the transcendental reduction. Even though the latter was not Cassirer’s concern,⁴ appresentation’s “mediacy of intentionality [...] going out from [...] the primordial world” (ibid., 109) is comparable with symbolic pregnancy’s “relatedness of the single perceptive phenomenon [...] to a characteristic total meaning” (Cassirer 1970, 202). This applies to intentional objects in general. As Husserl had pointed out in *Experience and Judgement*, for instance, intentional objects are either connected within a kind of general temporal, and therefore objective horizon, within ‘positional’ consciousness. Or in the case of quasi-positionality, as for example in phantasy, intentional objects are quasi-positated together within a horizon of specific phantasms or in the quasi-generality of the world of phantasy (cf. Husserl 1973a, §§ 38f., 162–171).

Thus, while intending to make rather general remarks on the topic of cultural meaning constitution, we can find a functional convergence of the concepts of symbolic pregnancy formation and appresentation: as the appresented element is closely linked to an originary present one, the ‘physical self’ of a symbol embodies sense due to symbolic pregnancy formation. As Klaus Christian Köhnke (2019, 235–239) puts it, here lie the conditions for the possibility of culture. Therefore, in accordance with this essential assumption of the philosophy of culture, we need

Identitätsbildung für Bewußtseinsmomente und der an sie anschließenden Symbolbildung betreibt.”

⁴ Furthermore, Cassirer (1970, xiv) speaks of the “Phenomenology of Knowledge” – the very title of the third volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – “not in its [the word ‘phenomenology’] modern sense but with its fundamental signification as established and systematically grounded by Hegel.”

to state again what Cassirer (2000, 43) wrote in his *Logic of the Cultural Sciences*: “This appearance of a ‘meaning,’ which is not detached from the physical but is embodied by it and in it, is the factor common to all those contents that we denote by the term *culture*.”

This short outline of the connection between Husserl and Cassirer may suffice for the moment. After shedding light on the phenomenal relation between the mediacy of intentionality and the ‘relatedness to a characteristic total meaning,’ we will come back to this connection again. Now, we have to look not just at the general but at the systematic position *appresentation* holds within the process of cultural meaning constitution.

3 Husserl’s Notion of ‘Concrete Appresentation’

By stating the constitutional necessity of appresentation for the process of giving meaning to other persons, including their actions, reciprocally as well as of others giving meaning to the subject, Husserl sketches a basic meaning structure of the cultural world. In *Cartesian Meditations* he writes about

[...] the same natural Object in its possible modes of givenness to the other Ego. This is repeated *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of subsequently constituted mundanities of the concrete Objective world as it always exists for us; namely as a world of men and culture. (Husserl 1982, 125)

However, one might add, even though Husserl implies that culture is given meaning socially by appresentation, in the *Cartesian Meditations* he did not follow up with these, so to speak, ‘higher’ or ‘secondary’ appresentational modes of cultural meaning constitution (cf. *ibid.*, 111). In contrast, in some of his posthumously published manuscripts Husserl elaborates the concepts of ‘work’ (*Werk*) and ‘possession’ (*Habe*). As a result, Husserl specifies a form of appresentation as ‘concrete appresentation’ regarding its symbolic function. Not only does this particular form of appresentation indirectly attribute consciousness to others on the basis of their individual bodily presence, mostly as “empathy” (*Einfühlung*) (*ibid.*, § 54, 117–120, or Husserl 1973b, 26–31) or “expressions” (*Ausdrücke*) (Husserl 1989, 175, and supplement XII.2, § 1, 340–343); it also co-presents elements which are more

than ‘unperceived’ or ‘unperceivable’ parts of the “concrete presentation” (Husserl 2008, 410). Insofar as Husserl sheds light on the appresentation of the “concrete real,” of “objects in the broadest sense” or of “real elements as qualities,” he clarifies concrete appresentation as a “making present” of other people and groups, including their actions, by means of things, etc. (ibid., 411).⁵

At this point we need to recollect a notion presented by the philosophical anthropologist Michael Landmann (1913–1984). In his collection of essays *Der Mensch als Schöpfer und Geschöpf der Kultur* he outlined the important necessity of human “sociality” for culture by means of which people “grow” into a certain culture, and by which they are culturally socialized: “[N]ur die Sozietät ist es, durch die er [der Mensch] in die Kultur hineinwächst” (Landmann 1961, 36; my emphasis). Gained from transcendental phenomenological analysis, Husserl’s concept of concrete appresentation takes into account, at a phenomenal level, the social dimension of culture which is a crucial part, so to speak, of the appresentation itself. This is true insofar as cultural meaning is socially constituted as well as conveyed by means of appresentational relations. This is by no means a trivial point. For example, an emptied plate appresents the earlier presence of a person. Similarly, inherent in furniture is a certain purpose which appresents its creator, and so on. Husserl (2008, 411; my translation) writes:

One sees [...] a bullet hole in the window, a hewed stone, etc. Cultural artifacts are considered as things in the light of their objectual qualities; but they are at same time apperceived as cultural creations with cultural qualities. Appresented are humans who have made such artifacts for their purposes as well as humans to whom such artifacts serve as practical and as useful for possible purposeful activities.

Here, appresentation is an important constitutional element in the ‘making’ of cultural meaning, since Husserl not only understands culture along the transcendental intersubjective demarcation between ‘home world’ and ‘alien world’ as in *Cartesian Meditations*, but points to the constitution of a cultural world which is constituted by means of co-presented elements that also co-present meaning from different dimensions of the lifeworldly horizon. The particular kind of plate may

⁵ In this regard, Srubar (2009) sees a contiguity between Schutz and Cassirer.

be an artwork, a ritual device or an 'ordinary' instrument of daily life. In each case more is appresented than just the other side of the object. All of those various artifacts are constituted by an appresentation different from the appresentational pairing taking place in the 'immediacy' of the empathetic co-presentation that 'gives' the consciousness of others in accordance with the others' originary physical body (*Körper*) and the modulated form of my primordiality. Here, the appresentational pairing involves a sociocultural meaning of single others and groups of other people, their activities as well as their creation and use of artifacts, such as buildings, tools or things of daily use.⁶ Insofar as such meanings are "sedimented" (Husserl 1973a, 49f., 211f.) within the subject's stock of knowledge (see Schutz 1990a) in the process of the individual's socialization, they gain historical persistence in social life.⁷ Therefore, in the constitution of a cultural world there is appresentation 'at work' or, as we might say in light of this paper, symbolic pregnancy.

4 Alfred Schutz's Phenomenology of the Lifeworld as Constituted by Appresentation

The notion of a lifeworld culturally constituted by way of appresentation was taken up and elaborated by Alfred Schutz. According to him, it is appresentation "that transform[s] things into cultural objects, human bodies into fellowmen, their bodily movements into actions or significant gestures, waves of sound into speech etc." (Schutz 1990c, 328) The Schutzian perspective is thus characterized by the idea that the multiplicity of meaning dimensions is experienced by means of *symbolic* appresentational pairings. In order to answer the question of what appresentational symbols are, we need to know that in his phenomenology of the lifeworld Schutz had identified numerous realities in addition to the 'world of everyday life.'

⁶ According to Köhnke (2003), all these aspects are the subject of philosophy of culture.

⁷ This is the non-Hegelian theory of the dialectical relation between 'objective spirit' (*objektiver Geist*) and 'subjective spirit' (*subjektiver Geist*) and the 'condensation of thought' (*Verdichtung des Denkens*) presented by Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) (see Lazarus 2003), who was not only one among the progressive thinkers within German social sciences and philosophy of culture, but was also cited by early U.S.-American sociologists and pragmatists such as William Graham Sumner (1906, 4, 60) or William James (1950a, 624ff., 676; 1950b, 84, 96f., 369).

We must reserve a comparison of his theory of multiple realities with Husserl's differentiation between lifeworld and "special regional worlds" (Husserl 1962, 459–462; cf. Marx 1970) for another paper. Here, I briefly introduce some of the constitutional aspects of Schutz's (1990c, 340) theory of, as he calls them following William James, "multiple realities" or "finite provinces of meaning."

According to Schutz (1990b, 230), it is "the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality." "Hence," Schutz goes on,

[...] we call a certain set of our experiences a finite province of meaning if all of them show a specific cognitive style and are – with respect to this style – not only consistent in themselves but also compatible with one another. (Ibid.)

Examples of such finite provinces of meaning are the world of everyday life, the "world of phantasy," the "world of religion," the "world of dreams," and the "world of scientific theory." Each of these worlds is correlated with a certain "cognitive style" (ibid., 230ff.). To be taken or experienced as real, such provinces of meaning need to be accentuated as real. According to Schutz (1976a, 141f., 150, 155), if I have bestowed the "accent of reality" on a particular province of meaning, this constitutes the only real world for me at that moment. In order to switch between different realities, as Schutz (1990b, 231f.) puts it, borrowing an expression from Kierkegaard, we must perform a certain "leap" that involves a modification of the accent of reality as well as the corresponding cognitive style. From this perspective all other possible realities are seen as quasi-realities. If elements grounded in different realities are not interrelated, these elements as well as their corresponding provinces of meaning are, furthermore, reciprocally irrelevant (cf. Schutz & Luckmann 1973, 156).

But regarding our world as a cultural one, we need to keep in mind that it is full of different interrelated and overlapping meanings. We know such a thing as religious art, and we can talk about our dreams even when we are not dreaming.⁸ Therefore, there must be crossing-points that bridge the demarcations between

⁸ Here, my view diverges from Schutz (1990c, 342; cf. Stuck 2022, ch. IV).

provinces of meaning, create a connection between the currently accented reality and elements of worlds from which this accent is withdrawn.

5 Appresentational Relations

Schutz' essay "Symbol, Reality and Society" highlights the role of appresentation in the process of bringing different realities together. In the following I will concentrate on this aspect of the manifold dimensions of 'appresentational relations,' as Schutz calls them. First, we need to say that Schutz divides appresentational pairings into two or more members. For our purpose it suffices to say that there is an "appresenting" or given member of the coupling and an "appresented" or co-presented one (Schutz 1990c, 295). Schutz distinguishes three different appresentational relations, in which both members belong to the same realm of a province: "marks," "indications," and "signs" (*ibid.*, 308–329). For our purpose we can leave aside those cases where the appresentational members belong to one single province, as well as its corresponding relations.

The appresentational coupling of 'symbols,' which I want to emphasize here instead, is constituted differently. According to Schutz, in the case of 'symbolic' appresentation the appresenting term belongs to the world of everyday life whereas the appresented or co-presented member of the coupling belongs to another reality. Therefore, in his words, we can "define the symbolic relationship as an appresentational relationship between entities belonging to at least two finite provinces of meaning so that the appresenting symbol is an element of the paramount of everyday life." (*Ibid.*, 343) As I have shown elsewhere, one can argue that appresentational symbols are in fact couplings between two or more different realities, but they do not necessarily need to be constituted in a way that the appresenting member strictly belongs to the realm of the everyday lifeworld (see Stuck 2022, ch. IV).⁹ I cannot go into detail here, but if the appresenting part of the pair could not belong to other realms than the world of everyday life, it would not be possible, for example, to create a symbol within the world of scientific theory which

⁹ Concerning this point, I disagree with Michael Schramm (2014, 174f.) who sees a difference between Cassirer and Schutz regarding Schutz's over-emphasis of the functional importance of the everyday lifeworld, which in itself appears as contradictory.

refers to the everyday lifeworld. In other words, the world of everyday life and its objects could not be topics for scientific research (cf. Schutz 1976b, 81). Therefore, as I argue, the appresenting member may belong to any of the finite provinces of meaning, so that we are able to build up symbols linking any two realities. The advantage of such an interpretation of the Schutzian theoretical approach is that it allows us to explain how the multiplicity of cultural meanings characteristic of modernity, based on experiences of ‘belonging’ at the same time to different religions, milieus, economies, political systems, etc., is constituted. Schutz (1990c, 343) saw this problem, but addressed it only briefly: “there are many combinations [of appresentational pairings] such as religious art, etc.” These combinations are possible, as Schutz points out, because each member of an appresentational relation as well as the relation itself is connected to certain appresentational orders or schemes that determine the meaning of the relation in question (*ibid.*, 297–300).

Regarding the aforesaid, we need to recognize that the appresented member, which belongs to another realm than the actually accented one, is always interpreted “by means of systems of relevances belonging to other levels of reality” (Schutz 2011, 154). Hence, the appresented term of the coupling, including its “referential scheme” (i.e., the order of the appresented member) is understood according to the system or “interpretational scheme” (i.e., the order according to which each scheme and respectively each pairing’s member is related; cf. Schutz 1990c, 299) of the province of meaning on which the accent of reality is actually bestowed. Schutzian phenomenology emphasizes the fact that even elements from different provinces of meaning can be brought together and comprehended in light of the actually accentuated reality, that is the actual cognitive style and its correlated and sedimented knowledge. This is of importance to us inasmuch as we can now specify the above-mentioned convergence between Cassirer’s philosophy and Husserl’s phenomenology.

6 Schutz, Husserl, Cassirer: Appresentation, Symbolic Pregnancy, and Symbolic Forms

Schutz would not contradict the idea that emphasizes the correspondence of the interpretational schemes belonging to appresentation with those cognitive styles that constitute provinces of meaning (cf. *ibid.*, 298). According to him, the

“attitude humans adopt” equals “the subjective meaning man bestows upon certain experiences” (Schutz 1990b, 210), that is, as he further specifies, “[a]ll interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of ‘knowledge at hand’ function as *scheme of reference*” (ibid., 208; my emphasis). Those adopted attitudes as well as such schemes correspond to cognitive styles according to which human experiences are correlated with reference to multiple realities, as the aforementioned schemes are “orders” that separate realities from each other “and constitute [...] them as [...] finite province[s] of meaning.” (Schutz 1990c, 298) Even though Schutz differs from Husserl in that he would not accept, for example, Husserl’s (1989, 388; my emphasis) idea of a division of “the surrounding world *first* of all things as mere nature and *then* all concrete cultural formations as things of higher level,”¹⁰ he takes the Husserlian concept of the lifeworldly *a priori* seriously into account and considers culturality along with sociality as an overall given “principle” that even “determines” the naturalistic attitude of sciences as well as the “philosophical world-view” (Schutz 1990c, 312; Schutz & Gurwitsch 1989, 212).¹¹ Generally speaking, however, the notion of intentional systems (Husserl 1998, 23f.; cf. Orth 1975, 153f.) as systems of “mental” processes constituting a meaningful world and/or worlds, is an idea we can trace back to both philosophers.

Regarding the Husserlian term of “attitudes” in the widest sense of “cognitive types” (ibid.) and Cassirer’s symbolic forms, Orth (1996, 310) clarified their functional equivalence with the following words: “*Cognitive Typen sind je bestimmte Einstellungen, die als je eigene Formen eines ursprünglichen Bezuges des Menschen zu sich selbst und zur Welt bestimmt werden können.*” According to his interpretation, ‘cognitive types’ (*cognitive Typen*) are certain attitudes which are identifiable

¹⁰ Cf. Orth 1975, 158. Especially, Orth (1987) has discussed the different interpretations of the relation between nature and culture within Husserl’s *oeuvre*.

¹¹ Schutz (1990b, 250; my emphasis) writes: “the scientist enters a *preconstituted* world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science.” (Cf. Cassirer 2000, 30f.) Orth (1996, 313; my emphasis) illustrates this point regarding Cassirer: “*der Naturbegriff [erweist sich] als ein Grenzbegriff unserer menschlichen Erfahrung, und man kann sagen, unser Wirklichkeitsbegriff ist grundsätzlich medial, d.h. eine je eigene Korrelation von Stoff und Form, von Gehalt und geistiger Durchdringung des Gehaltes.*”

as particular forms of human beings' original – in the Husserlian sense – relation to themselves and to the world. Orth finds this relational character in Cassirer's philosophy as well. Insofar as Cassirer's considerations are concerned, each phenomenon is pre-logically structured as a "stamped form" (Cassirer 2000, 18), and insofar as Cassirer (1970, 200ff.) understands the inner relation of reproductive consciousness as *intentional* and identifies it with *symbolic pregnance*, Orth can state: "*der Begriff der symbolischen Form [...] bei Cassirer [...] [ist,] mit dem der cogitativen Typen vergleichbar*" (Orth 1996, 312). Thus, Cassirer's term of *symbolic forms* is comparable with that of cogitative types.

By comparing the notions of both philosophers, we can briefly illuminate their conceptual convergence. On the one side, Husserl speaks about "intentional mental processes" as "consciousness of something, [so] they are said to be 'intentionally referring' to this something." (Husserl 1983, 73) If we follow Orth (1975, 156), there are many ways in which noematic/noetic relations are applicable to certain cogitative types. He considers with Husserl (1998, 26f.) "perception – perceived," "retention – retended" (*Retention – Retentioniertes*), "reproduction – reproduced" as well as "natural", "naturalistic attitude" or "attitude of the humanities" as examples of such types (Orth 1975, 146, 158). In Orth's view, cogitative types are "noetic-noematic aggregates" (*noetisch-noematische Aggregate*), which again underpins the correspondence of Schutzian *cognitive styles* with Husserlian *cogitative types* (ibid., 146). For in Schutz's phenomenology, such styles need a relation to the stock of knowledge. Insofar as such a stock comprises formerly sedimented experiences, and insofar as the noetic-noematic correlation as a principle of intentionality is the fundamental dimension of consciousness and experience, the stock of experiences/knowledge can be seen as sedimented aggregations of certain noetic-noematic correlations that constitute certain provinces of meaning and/or realities.¹² In this sense Orth (1996, 308; my translation and my emphasis) concludes: "Cogitative types can be interpreted as forms of projections of the world [*Weltentwürfen*]

¹² In this regard, Husserl (1983, 228) writes: "the full noematic correlate [...] [corresponds with] the 'sense' (in the broadest signification of the word)." And Schutz and Luckmann (1973, 135) point out: "the structure of the stock of knowledge is in essence derivable from the forms of the acquisition of knowledge and thus from the process of the sedimentation of experience." Therefore, correlations 'within' certain experiences, as their 'meaning,' are sedimented as meaningful experiences, i.e., so to speak, in a specific manner of correlation.

which are characterized by one's own lifestyles, styles of action, thinking as well as of own forms of interaction."

On the other side, Cassirer (2000, 39) elaborates the intentionality of consciousness as follows: "There is no perception that does not intend a determined 'object' and that is not directed toward it." (Cf. Orth 1996, 312f.) Insofar as "it is precisely the function of the symbolic itself that is the precondition for the grasp of all 'objects' or facts" (Cassirer 2000, 31), intentionality in light of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, as Orth (1996, 312f.) emphasizes, is a symbolic function which has its effect by means of symbolic pregnancy formation. Therefore, and since, according to Schutz, appresentation is always included in meaning constitution as well (even if it is just the appresentation of rear aspects, etc.), appresentation and symbolic pregnancy must be seen as functional equivalents in light of Schutzhian phenomenology and Cassirer's philosophy. In the same way, as stated above, since appresentation is a basic constituent of the meaningfulness of provinces of meaning and cultural meaning itself, "symbolic pregnancy is [...] the developmental moment in the setting of the worlds of form and sense" (Schwemmer 1997, 121; my translation).

7 Conclusion

The point I want to stress here goes beyond the rather exegetical conclusion reached in the previous section. One benefit of recognizing the relation between Cassirer, Schutz and Husserl may consist in the insight into the reference of symbolic pregnancy formation to other symbolic forms and their social-cultural constitution. Regarding the latter, symbolic pregnancy formation of symbolic forms can be explained by the structural constitution of the forms themselves, as Cassirer did, which is constitutionally underpinned by the social aspect of pregnancies structured by Husserlian concrete appresentation. In this view, a cultural artifact may indeed be symbolically pregnant according to a certain form, as, for example, a cup may be a ritual device in religion. But, if we follow Husserl's notion of concrete appresentation, there is even more: the cup apprehended as a chalice is also symbolically pregnant with regard to appresented others and their actions. The chalice is not just a container for the wine, which is symbolically pregnant as the blood of Christ, it also receives its very meaning from the fact that it is used in a

social situation, i.e., communion, in which it is shared with others and in which it has to be consecrated by a priest in advance. Thus, we can gain analytical access both to the what and the how of the meaning relation of symbols with Cassirer and also to the who and whose actions are involved in a symbol's cultural meaning. After all, it makes a difference whether a symbol is used by my mother, by a scientist, by someone I do not trust, etc. – especially nowadays, when the word 'post-factual age' is on everyone's lips.

In addition, Schutz' phenomenology of appresentation presents us with an idea of the interconnection of symbols and their correlated provinces and schemes, a task we mentioned at the beginning of this paper. As we have seen, it follows from Schutz's insights that we can further analyse the multiformities of symbols due to pregnancy formation and/or appresentation. From a cultural philosophical perspective that takes this point of view seriously, everyday symbols could be analysed as related to the economical realm and its overlap with religious experiences, as done in Max Weber's (1950) classical study *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Furthermore, we know symbols in sports or the sciences which are close to religious phenomena, as in fan-culture (cf. Schmidt-Lux 2010) and scientism (cf. Schmidt-Lux 2008), and we may find similar phenomena in online groups. In light of Schutzian phenomenology, a goalkeeper, for example, could not be a goddess in the strict sense of an established religion, but she might be considered as one under the circumstances – i.e., according to the systems of relevance – of the world of soccer. The goalkeeper is a goddess from the 'religious' viewpoint of a certain soccer-province of meaning. Here, a particular concept transcends the limits of its reality by being related to meaning from another province. In other words, the goalkeeper appresents divinity – which may belong to a religious province – according to an interpretational scheme that is valid within the currently accentuated 'reality of soccer.'

Culture, regarded from this perspective, can therefore be described as a multi-dimensional and multifunctional web of meanings which we often find concentrated in just one focal point – in one single symbolic usage and/or action, for example. By bringing Cassirer, Husserl and Schutz together, the perspective of the cultural sciences on cultural phenomena can advance one more step "toward all the forms of 'world understanding'" (Cassirer 1970, 50; see also Cassirer 2009b, 137), as Cassirer had put it in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. According to the focus of this paper, which tried to synthesize Cassirerian philosophy and phenomenology of Husserlian provenience, those forms of 'world understanding' can be regarded

as different but simultaneously possible worldviews crossing in symbols. Using Cassirer's terminology, we can conclude that symbolic pregnancy as basic constituent of symbolic forms – or cogitative types – is also a fundamental factor in the interlinking of those forms, insofar as a symbol contains different meanings that it represents, which at the same time 'produce' a new symbolic relation (cf. Cassirer 1955, 61f.; Srubar 2009, 306). Insofar as those meanings are different from the symbol itself as well as different from the actual form, but apprehended in accordance with this form, we have an accordance with the Schutzian idea of the relation between the appresenting term's "apperceptual" or respectively "appresentational scheme" and the appresented member's "referential scheme" in light of the all-encompassing interpretational schemes (Schutz 1990c, 299). Therefore, we propose a semantic change from 'representing' something to '*appresenting*' something according to an actual symbolic form.¹³

In fact, my proposal is just one step in the direction towards a philosophy of culture that is concerned with the totality of forms in which life takes place. It is a small step, for there is further work to do concerning the convergence of Cassirer's and Husserlian phenomenology, regarding, for instance, the approach of genetic phenomenology which might stand in the way of such a convergence. Since the notion of genetic constitution is eminently involved in the pre-logical or rather "pre-predicative" experience of a culturally structured world, we would have to settle the question whether the dynamic relation of "active" or "passive genesis" and "synthesis" (Husserl 1982, §§ 38f., 77–81; 1973a)¹⁴ is compatible with Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer 1953, 81; see also Cassirer 1955, 14, 24, 215 and Srubar 2009, 296f., 301), in which "passivity" first of all seems connected with "the passive world of mere impression"¹⁵ and from which the symbolic forms tend towards a "world of expression." Whereas, according to Husserl (1973a, 59), even

¹³ I have analysed the phenomenon of 'appresentational representation' as lived representational experience (*Repräsentationserleben*) in Stuck (2022, ch. VI.2.e.ii).

¹⁴ According to Husserl (1973, § 28, 129–132, § 50, 205–215, and § 67, 274–281), intentional grasping may 'oscillate' from passive "pre-givenness" to active apprehension and again back to passivity, etc.

¹⁵ Srubar (2009, 301; my emphasis) identifies Cassirer's "symbolic function" with Husserl's "passive synthesis," but also differentiates both: "under the influence of Husserl, Schutz no longer attributes the ability of the mind to typify and generalize to the symbolic function [as Cassirer does, B. S.], but rather localizes it – *with Husserl* – in the *passive synthesis* within the temporal consciousness."

a basic impression is an act,¹⁶ Cassirer (1970, 285f.) focuses on the “com-position” of culturally mediated acts and, therefore, addresses the “surface of reality” (Cassirer 1945, 169) as a realm of impressions. According to him, this realm ‘lacks’ the symbolic and needs the latter as an anthropological characteristic of human life (cf. Cassirer 1970, 2ff., and ch. II, 23–26).

In this regard, another question arises: if we focused the notions of activity and passivity in light of Cassirer’s concepts of the symbolic basis-functions of “expressive function,” “representative function,” and “function of signification” (see, e.g., Seitz 2019, 53–57, 131–134; Cassirer 2004), would we then be able to bring Husserl and Cassirer closer together? We cannot answer this question here. Whatever the answer will be, I hope this short attempt to align Cassirer’s, Husserl’s and Schutz’s ideas will help the philosophy of culture in its goal to obtain a clearer philosophical understanding of the conditions of possibility of culture.

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¹⁶ “[E]ven the purely perceptive contemplation of a pregiven substrate proves to be our *achievement*, an act, and not a mere suffering of impressions” (Husserl 1973a, 59).

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Husserl's and Cassirer's Naïve Historico-Cultural Progressivism as Viewed Through a Radical Reworking of Köhler's Value Theory

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Abstract: Husserl and Cassirer stand, according to their own self-understanding, as key 20th century figures in the cultivation of Enlightenment's principles and views on humanity, culture, and history. In a word, they both understand European culture and history as a story of progress (§ 1). As I see it, central in a culture and its dynamics is its system of values, and a grounded understanding of the issue of progress presupposes an adequate theory of the standing or constitution as well as of the givenness and transvaluation of values. Neither Husserl nor Cassirer, however, actually advanced any such theory. We are still in need of one in order to account for culture's formation and dynamics in history. Next, I briefly review Husserl's and Cassirer's available problematic views on values (§ 2). Then, in § 3, I examine some of the central problems in the traditional approaches to culture and to values. In § 4, I appeal to Köhler's very interesting Gestalt theoretical approach to values and pinpoint some of its problems. Next, in § 5, I suggest how we could start the research from below, from the level of the organism, which could eventually shed some new light on the problem of value constitution and givenness. Finally, in § 6, I attempt to sketch an explanation for how we can use this new approach to values in order to understand actual cultural formation and its historicity, in a way that goes further than the whiggish philosophy of history.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, Ernst Cassirer, Wolfgang Köhler, Philosophy of Culture, Philosophy of History, Values, Meaning

“We shall perish by the very thing by which we fancy that we live.”

Charles Baudelaire: *Fusées* (1851)¹⁷

1 Introduction: Husserl’s and Cassirer’s Understandings of Culture and History

The early 20th century was a complicated time. Humanity had witnessed the triumph of the natural sciences and efforts to render the human sciences as scientific as the natural ones. It was a period characterized by an intensification of the spread of naturalism and accompanying debates concerning the fate of normativity (theoretical and practical) in a solely natural reality. Meanwhile, an unexpected crisis had just emerged concerning the foundations of mathematics and physics after the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries and non-Newtonian physics. The intellectuals of the period found themselves faced with a difficult puzzle: how could anyone make sense of the cognitive and practical situation of (European) humanity as it appeared at that time? The transition from the ancient ‘closed cosmos’ to the modern ‘open universe’ was causing a gradual growth of nihilism with regard to the status of normative guidance, which confronted European humanity with an indifferent natural reality. Our painstakingly gained, and supposedly firm and permanent, truths were now appearing obscured.

Husserl and Cassirer stand as emblematic figures among the intellectuals that were, at the time, imbued with the incurably optimistic spirit of the modern era. Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology (together with positivism) were the last flares – or possibly dying flickers – of traditional philosophy’s belief that all problems of the human condition could be solved in absolutely rational terms. Both Cassirer and Husserl, as children of the Enlightenment, made an effort to save European culture from the rising crisis and the specters of nihilism, relativism, and irrationalism.

Husserl called on us to make sense of science, the ultimate and highest achievement of the Enlightenment’s theoretical rationality, as an intellectual accomplishment founded in our experience of the primordial lifeworld. He also tried to ground objective values and ethics in the non-theoretical but still rule-following

¹⁷ Quoted in Löwith (1949, 98).

intentional syntheses pertinent to an emotive rationality, which would then motivate correct moral praxis. If this grounding were to succeed, scientific truth, individual freedom, and responsibility, the ground and *telos* of European humanity, could again serve as normative examples for the future of humanity as a whole.

Meanwhile, Cassirer asked us to understand modern science and culture as the ultimate achievements of the symbolic-formative functions of transcendental consciousness or spirit. On the basis of symbolic formation, humanity advanced, through language, mythos, and religion, toward its highest attainment in the rationality of theoretical science. He also invited us to see the Enlightenment's ideals of individual freedom and responsibility as those on the basis of which humanity realizes its essence and can still organize itself in its development towards a glorious future.

Then, both Husserl and Cassirer undersign the Enlightenment's progressivist view of science, culture, and history,¹⁸ taking the human capacity for reflective self-interpretation as a capability to arrive at ultimate truths about reality and the self.¹⁹ Thus, they endorse a modern whiggish understanding of history, one already expressed emblematically by Kant, and emphasize the – supposedly self-evident – triumph of individual subjectivity: a subjectivity that may not *know*, but is *rationally justified in believing* that it has realized the ultimate purpose of nature's hidden *logos*. Thus, modern humanity's megalomaniac, secular eschatological meaning-attribution to its course through history still fueled Husserl's and Cassirer's thought.²⁰

¹⁸ For Husserl's case, see, e.g., Caygill (2005), Casement (1988), Kelkel (1979), and Theodorou (2016). For Cassirer's, see, e.g., Krois (1975), Luft (2011), and Wisner (1997).

¹⁹ Inspired by both Husserl and Cassirer, Luft (2011, 356) considers Enlightenment culture as a "home" and "safe haven" for humanity, which should abide within it, "living life to its fullest" and staying safely away from all non- or contra-Enlightenment "subcultures." By contrast, I favor the outlook of Staiti (2012, 328), who pertinently observes the following: "[W]ho is in charge of deciding what counts as Culture with capital C and what counts as a mere niche, or a subculture which is, in Luft's words, 'the enemy of culture'? [...] Around 200 AD Christianity was a niche, a persecuted subculture [...]. The civil rights movement in the United States was perhaps less than a niche or a subculture in the 1950s. [...] Some of the best, most authentic cultural developments in human history were and still are made possible by the silent activity of creative minorities."

²⁰ Löwith presented the progressivist mentality in the Enlightenment philosophy of history, marked by a belief in the movement towards a triumph of reason, freedom, and

As concerns culture and history, neither Husserl's nor Cassirer's analyses and argumentations were successful. On the one hand, their endeavors fall short of methodological completeness and effectiveness. Husserl does not show why or how intentional consciousness actually grounds theoretical and axiological normativity or safeguards universal rationality and progress. Nor does Cassirer demonstrate why or how symbolic formation unquestionably leads to transforming rational ideas into normative ideals (I will return to this in section 2 below). On the other hand, the very views they tried to justify are themselves disputable from various points of view, including those of Romanticism, the hermeneutics of suspicion (e.g., Marxian, Nietzschean, and Freudian views on culture and history), and post-colonialist discourse (or guilt, if you like). For example, those who wish to valorize the Enlightenment cannot simply circumvent Romanticism and its critique of rationalism's objectivism and universalism by dismissing it as reactionary caprice. Science and philosophy conceptualize and universalize truth, but why should this also be applied to concrete existence and praxis, which appear to be essentially partial and perspectival?

The presuppositions for a general critique of culture still evade us. Such an endeavor is only possible if we adopt an *epoché vis-à-vis* the Western ideology of the omnipotence and omniscience of reason and review the roots of cultural genesis in the most basic phenomena. For me, this means examining value constitution and value apprehension in our concrete and – more often than not – dolorous contact with a reality that resists us. If we are to understand our relation to culture and history, we have to examine the *sources* that constitute our views on what is possible and our existential-practical orientation toward this reality. The former is accomplished in our perceptual experiences and scientific theories. The latter needs to be examined in terms of value constitution and cultural self-understanding. And this leads us to three key questions: (A) Where exactly do values arise in our relatedness with natural reality? (B) How are they involved in cultural formation?

happiness, as the result of the secularization of the Judeo-Christian religious eschatology between the 17th and the 18th century (see, for instance, ch. 4 of Löwith 1949). Meanwhile, in 1962 and 1966, Blumenberg (1983) countered this notion with a defense of modernity's immanent, rationalist legitimacy in relation to its radical optimistic aspirations. For an attempt at a bio-existentialist interpretation of both religious and secular radical optimist readings of history, see Theodorou (2016).

(C) What gives rise to cultural diversity in its synchronic/spatial and diachronic/historical multifariousness?

With these questions in mind, in § 2, I will briefly review Husserl's and Cassirer's problematic or implicit views on values. Then, in § 3, I will examine some of the central problems in the traditional approaches to culture and to values. In § 4, I will appeal to Köhler's interesting Gestalt theoretical approach to values and pinpoint some of its problems. Next, in § 5, I will suggest how we could make progress with the problem of value constitution and givenness. And finally, in § 6, I will attempt to sketch an explanation for how we can use this new approach to values in order to understand cultural formation and its historicity.

2 Traces of Husserl's and Cassirer's Theories of Values

Both Husserl and Cassirer articulated interesting theories of science in its historicity, but neither succeeded in developing a working theory of value constitution and givenness (moral, aesthetic, or otherwise), let alone explaining how these are involved in the formation of culturality and how culture is exposed to radical diversity and change.

John Michael Krois offers a valuable account of what Cassirer would have said about values.²¹ Humans, Cassirer says, are capable of giving symbolic form to experience. This means that they develop the capacity to “distinguish between actuality and possibility, between facts and ideals, and between what is and what ought to be. [...] [And thus,] Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms can be seen to contain [...] a philosophy of value” (Krois 1975, 65). The general view here is that the idea of humanity and its progress in history is a kind of symbolic formation projected on the facts of human life and their sequence in time. This idea becomes an ideal. But the way Cassirer understands this process, the passage from mythical taboos via religious commands to the Enlightenment's axiological

²¹ As we may have expected, the Marburg neo-Kantian Cassirer does not have a distinct theory of values. Krois, an eminent Cassirer scholar, tried to reconstruct Cassirer's unwritten theory of values and their relation to culture. The meagre traces of such textual evidence are presented in Krois (1975, esp., 65, 76f., 102–106, 131–170).

normativity shows that humans only fully realize their essence in the final phase. Here, they become individuals capable of freedom, autonomy, and self-responsibility, thus earning their dignity. For Cassirer, there is no value proper without a subject-object dichotomy or the symbolic formation of the self-given rule of an ideal ‘ought.’ That is, mythic (mimetic of the supranatural) and religious (analogical to the supranatural) experiences of reality do not yet count as humanly proper valuative views of reality. According to this approach, such a view is achieved only in the purely symbolic or theoretical-abstract representation of the supranatural, which, moreover, has become non-transcendent and commensurate with a self-conscious, autonomous conception of the normative ‘ought’ conceived as an a priori constitutive and regulative ideal. Unsurprisingly, this is basically a repetition of Kant’s view on the matter. Be that as it may, this is difficult to apply in the case of non-moral values. Kant had to devise a painful, prolonged method to attempt to make such a connection between the aesthetic and the moral, but Cassirer does not seem to appeal to this or create one of his own. To be sure, there are some elements (not strictly related to the preceding concerns) of Cassirer’s work (see Cassirer 2013, esp. chs. 2, 5, 7, 9) where, however, beauty is not classed as a value; only ‘style’ is mentioned, in this respect, as a form of symbolic meaning formation.²²

Cassirer showed intense interest in the development of Gestalt theory and Goldstein’s empirical neuro-psychological findings. He assimilated the spirit of its part-whole and foreground-background theory (i.e., the structuring or meaning of the ‘animating’ function of gestalts).²³ He did not see in it, however, the potential for a theory of values. This was Köhler’s achievement (see § 4 below).

As regards Husserl, we know that he tried to become a philosopher of values and spent quite some time on the problem. He toyed with the view that values are a kind of ‘coloring’ with which perceptual objects are ‘invested’ and that are

²² On the problems and limitations of these views, see, e.g., Alloa (2015) and Bundgaard (2011).

²³ See, for instance, Parszutowicz (2015) and Katsur (2018). Cassirer, we can guess, may also have drawn inspiration for his concept of symbolic formation from Husserl’s analysis regarding intentional constitution in the meaning-giving acts of consciousness, even though he read it inadequately and unfairly. Regarding this unfairness, I have in mind his criticism of Husserl’s content-form or hyle-meaning schema (see Cassirer 1957, 197ff.).

given to us in emotions as 'value-ceptions' (*Wertnehmungen*). He was led to an impasse, though, when he had to explicate the specific intentional constitution that we would expect to take place in acts that have values as their elusive, *sui generis* objects.²⁴ Strictly for the purposes of the present discussion, I will provocatively claim that Köhler's Gestalt theoretical analysis of values would have been an interesting escape route from Husserl's impasse. When we reach § 4 below, Husserlian readers will find, I hope, some justification for this claim. And in order to intensify this provocation, I will also claim that, as soon as we reach sections 3.3 and 3.4, the reader will hopefully also realize that Heidegger had developed elements of a theory of meaning or significance akin to Köhler's, but he refused to place them in a value-theoretical context.²⁵

3 Problems with Traditional Philosophies of Value

In section 3.1 and later in more detail in § 6, we will see why the lack of a working theory of values eliminates the possibility of building a solid critique of cultural formation and the historical evolution of culture. In Western thought, this results in ideological self-praise of the sort we saw above in Husserl and Cassirer. The lack of such a theory, though, is not a fault of these two thinkers, who offer here a chance for discussion. As we will see, values have proven an enigmatic topic for all philosophy. In the remainder of this section, then, we will review some reasons for this. And, naturally, we will see how their enigmatic status still blurs our understanding of culture and history.

²⁴ For a presentation and critique of this impasse, see Theodorou (2012; 2014).

²⁵ After all, Köhler himself repeatedly calls his theory 'phenomenological' and explicitly mentions Husserl's philosophy as a source of inspiration (he only distances himself from the method of 'the' – supposedly one, i.e., the transcendental – phenomenological reduction). Interestingly, he also remarks that he does not follow phenomenologists who have entered a path of sterile, vague, and aberrant theories in phenomenology (which might be aimed at Heidegger's developments; see, e.g., Köhler 1939, 47, 52f., 68, 409). Incidentally, it is notable that Heidegger does not refer to Köhler's ground-breaking conclusions from *Intelligenzprüfungen an Anthropoiden* (1917) in either his analysis of equipment in *Being and Time* (1927) or in similar analyses within his courses prior to this. For more on this subject, see Wise (2019).

3.1 Values and Culture: Which Is the Source of Which?

It is true that, in the relevant literature, values and culture are intimately connected, but it cannot really be said that their relation has been sufficiently spelled out. It seems instead to be considered self-evident. Krois' (1975, 109) own reconstruction of Cassirer's view on the relation between values and culture gives us a hint to this: "Cassirer's approach to the problem of value is to conceive it as a problem of culture. On this view, values have their origin in culture." He further states that "[t]he philosophy of symbolic forms [...] [shows that] values originate in culture [...] as a semiotic order" (ibid., 149). Later in the same text, he continues to say that "Cassirer's semiotic foundation and cultural approach to axiological questions provides a kind of logical basis for values" (ibid., 150). And finally, he concludes, "[t]he philosophy of symbolic forms [...] verifies the eighteenth-century view that culture is the source of values" (ibid., 158).²⁶ The idea here, then, is that culture gives birth to values, that it builds and forms them. This, however, appears to be a mistake. To view the matter in this way is a sign of the absence of a theory of values. After our analysis in section 6, we will see that it is not culture that creates values but rather the other way around.

3.2 What Do We Mean by 'Values'?

Many suggestions have been made for what values are. As concerns their nature, values (at least goodness, the ἀγαθόν) are said to be exceptional ideas more far-reaching than the standard ones (ἐπέκεινα της οὐσίας); rational ideals, meanings or significances; 'nothing but' feelings like pleasure and pain; points of view for the preservation or growth of life; styles according to which will-to-power builds and rebuilds reality; senses, meanings or significances projected in some interpretation of reality; ways of organizing parts in a whole; colorations with which natural things or the environments in which they exist are 'invested'; sources of satisfaction; gestalts or gestalt qualities; necessities, requirednesses, or

²⁶ The confusion behind this scheme is shown by the directly contradictory sentence following immediately: "Insofar as men engage themselves in the activities of human culture they are committed to certain values" (Krois 1975, 158).

affordances, etc. As concerns their givenness, values have been seen as objects of feelings, desires, emotions, interests, insights, reason, cognitive and practical attitudes, etc. And concerning their mode of being, values have been compared with facts: facts stand for what is, values stand for what ought to be; facts exist or stand, values hold or are valid; facts fall under concepts, values fall under ideals; facts require description and explanation, values prescribe and require understanding; facts develop causally in time, values indicate a course to be followed toward a purpose or end; facts follow laws, values stand as norms; facts are characterized by facticity, values are characterized by normativity, etc.

It is easy to see here that values have been one of the most puzzling and irritatingly obscure topics in philosophy. Among the various issues that these views pose for us, I think two are central: (A) that values involve a normative 'ought;' and (B) that values are seen as meanings.

3.3 Normativity and Values

The transition from the 'closed cosmos' to the 'open universe' immediately created the problem of values as we know it. Values clearly appeared as such under bright light, only to quickly withdraw and shroud themselves in dark mystery. This left us without grounding as concerns our need for normative organization and orientation in life and action. The fundamental idea adhered to by many thinkers since at least Hume and Kant has been that values are the antipode of facts conceived as the research object of the natural sciences. This is why, after the fall of absolute idealism in the middle of the 19th century, Windelband found in values the research object that could sustain philosophy despite the imperialist tendency of the natural sciences to conquer all areas of knowledge. More specifically, Windelband identified the (critical) valuing of *truth* in knowledge, of *goodness* in morality, and of *beauty* in aesthetics. Thus, a *normative* (in contradistinction to a *psychological*) understanding of Kant's transcendental philosophy appeared possible with regard to epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Philosophy investigates value, which characterizes the content of our objective (universally valid) cognitive, moral, and aesthetic judgments from the point of view of whether they (i.e., their truth, goodness, and beauty) comply with norms, normative conditions of possibility, synthetic a priori rules, and ideals, which do not have being, but are themselves

valid, hold good (i.e., ‘as they should’).²⁷ All Kantian constitutive and regulative conditions of possibility could be seen as non-facts/non-causes that are presupposed (a priori) in our experience of, in this context, our judgments about facts, motivations for actions, and the givenness of the basic forms of objects.²⁸ This is an outline of the one way (the explicit or official one, if you like) in which values connect to norms. At the same time, however, a certain shift appears to have surreptitiously taken place in the discussion of the object and method of philosophy (as opposed to the object and method of science). Truth, goodness, and beauty are *themselves* seen as values. Thus, it is not only the a priori presuppositions that stand as valid; the possibilities they open (i.e., the truth of the facts, the goodness of motivations/actions, and the beauty of the forms of objects) are also valid as values. Here, values, as the antipodes of facts, are not what necessarily holds as valid or normative *presuppositions*, but truthfulness, goodness, and beauty themselves are conceived as realities that *ought* to be realized.²⁹ Of course, on such an account the same could be said of all other values.

3.4 Meaning and/or Value

In the dialogue surrounding values, another serious and interesting confusion arose. As we saw in section 3.2, values ended up being treated as meanings. But

²⁷ For examples of this passing from the one to the other, see Beiser (2014, 499ff., 503) or also Heidegger (2000, 121ff.).

²⁸ In his mature thought, Heinrich Rickert proposed a combined view: values are transcendent ideal-logical (a priori) presuppositions, necessary laws, or norms that are only known in their actual “functionalization” in ongoing cognitive acts (see, for instance, Beiser 2009, esp. 22). Philosophy could, then, be the a priori science of the (a priori) presuppositions or necessary laws behind all normative and empirical sciences. In the broadest conception of this schema, philosophy could become a science of culture in its historical evolution. Husserl’s phenomenology moved along a very similar path. Neo-Kantianism and traditional phenomenology, however, reached their apex and experienced their fall without having found a convincing analysis of what value is and how it connects with the sciences and with culture.

²⁹ Heidegger (2000, 38f.) and Schnädelbach (1984, 164) appear to believe that the values that are possible to hold in the reality we experience are distinguishable from presupposed norms (in the neo-Kantian conception) on the basis that they are simply valid *without* also being connected with an ought. The way I present the matter here shows, however, that the supposed clear distinction does not hold.

meaningfulness and value are not typically adequately differentiated. This was clearly the case, for instance, in Nietzsche's many interchangeable uses of those terms,³⁰ and it also seems to have been a problem on Heidegger's mind ever since his first experiments, in his *Kriegsnotsemester* course of 1919, with treating the problem of meaning as a problem of values, taking the lead from the neo-Kantian approach of Rickert. Later, too, in *Being and Time*, we read: "In interpreting [i.e., in comprehending something *as* something], we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' [*Bedeutung*] over some naked thing, which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it" (Heidegger 1962, 190). As far as Heidegger was concerned, the very topic of 'value' should be abandoned and replaced throughout by the concept of meaning. In a – I think – fatal move, Heidegger rejected all talk about values, validity, and normativity, turning the discussion toward meaning and authenticity.

Also in Cassirer's writings, meaningfulness and values were not adequately distinguished. Symbolic formation is projection of meanings, a meaning-giving process and phenomenon. Thus, in his treatment of myth, for instance, he did not properly distinguish between meaning and value. What should be understood in terms of value (e.g., a taboo or a totem, or the sacred and the profane) are just projected meanings.³¹ In the next paragraph, I will continue examining this problem.

4 Value Emergence and Givenness in Köhler's Analysis

Adherents of Gestalt psychology, and in particular Köhler, who apparently wrote the longest explicit Gestalt theoretical analysis on the topic, conceive values in the

³⁰ For example, he says that "[t]he supreme values in whose service man should live [...] were erected over man [...] as if they were commands of God [...]. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems 'meaningless.' [...] The logic of [...] nihilism: what is at work in it? The idea of valuelessness, meaninglessness" (Nietzsche 1968, 10f.). He also claims that "the more superficially and coarsely it is conceived, the more valuable, definite, beautiful, and significant the world appears. The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear – meaninglessness approaches!" (Ibid., 326)

³¹ See also Krois (1975, 131, 169).

context of a more appropriate ‘topology’ and generally manage to advance the topic in a way and to a degree inaccessible to Husserl and Cassirer. Moreover, if we no longer view humans Platonically as beings in the likeness of God (i.e., as rational souls or rational *beings*), but rather consider them in an Aristotelian manner as rational *animals*, then the fact that Köhler advanced his theory of values against the backdrop of his ground-breaking research on the intelligence of chimpanzees acquires additional importance. This approach found fruitful continuation and expansion in Gibson’s ecological psychology. We can, therefore, base our new effort to build a naturalized theory of mind, capable of accommodating intentionality, values, and normativity, upon the general spirit of such approaches, which take the living organism as a starting point. Of course, this goes against Cassirer’s emphatically anthropocentric views regarding mind, value, and normativity, as well as Husserl’s militant anti-naturalism. But that is another story.

4.1 The Basic Idea

The model situation that Köhler has in mind for his analysis of the rise and appearance of value qualities is listening to a melody. Melodies are gestalt entities that are not reducible to the mere co-existence or sum of the tones from which they are composed. This can be demonstrated by the fact that we can recognize the same melody in a different key. When we start listening to a melody, we experience one tone following another in a way that is somehow ‘imposed’ by the sequence of the preceding tones and those that we somehow expect to follow. A melody is, then, a gestalt in the sense of an objective formation within reality, which dictates what seems to be required to fit in a context of relevant co-givenness. Replacing a tone in a melody with another tone that does not fit provokes a negative stance in the listener. This positive or negative *requiredness* is perceived: We have ‘insight into’ its being exerted by the gestalt and directed toward us.³² Due to this, Köhler, and

³² It is no surprise that Köhler (1939, 49–52) cites Husserl’s notions of *Einsicht* and *Evidenz* as a source of inspiration, at least on this point. These are notions that Husserl conceived in an effort to de-psychologize and render objective our relatedness to essential necessity as regards the holding or non-holding of a relationship or truth, the standing or non-standing of a state of affairs, etc.

Wertheimer before him, gave requiredness the status of a *vector*.³³ Requiredness, then, is not reducible to mere facts, but it is still a part of objective reality. And this suggests that normativity is possible in reality as a natural complement to the world of facts.³⁴

In a questionable move, however, Köhler (1939, 31) quickly equates all talk about value with that of requiredness or the 'ought' character involved in such cases, saying, "[l]et us [...] give the name value to this common trait of intrinsic requiredness." By this, he means "that some things 'ought to be' and others not" (ibid., 35). He further claims that "a theory of value does not necessarily consist in the reduction of requiredness to something else [...] [otherwise] a definition of value would be impossible" (ibid., 83). Elsewhere, he remarks that "value is not adequately described unless we mention what may be called a demand character that belongs to its very nature" (Köhler 1944, 206).³⁵ Köhler also declares that value is *essentially connected* with requiredness, since between them "there is more than a factual connection, as though the demand merely accompanied the value characteristic" and because "the attraction (or the negative vector) which issues from the object is felt to spring from the very nature of that value attribute" (ibid., 207).

Nonetheless, the phrasing of this point creates some doubt as to whether values are 'nothing but' – to use here reversely Köhler's often-repeated phrase against the reductionist spirit – requiredness or just issue requiredness. The situation gets even more complicated when we come across thoughts that leave open the possibility that what actually issues the vector of requiredness *may* be the relation between a gestalt and the subject: "A datum, an entity or an act is required within a context of other data, entities or acts. [...] [T]he structural nature of all requiredness

³³ The original discussion of this element of Gestalt theory used the terms *Forderung* and *Aufforderung*, which were first translated into English as 'requiredness' and 'claim' or 'demand,' though they were later made famous and combined under the single term 'affordance' by Gibson (see, e.g., Dreyfus 1996; 2007). De Monticelli (2013) recently brought this thematic and Köhler's work to the attention of phenomenologists working in the field of emotions and values.

³⁴ Furthermore, with his notions of positive and negative requiredness, Köhler, more effectively than in neo-Kantianism, analyzes the 'ought' or normative dimension in the context of values.

³⁵ We also read that "[t]he plus and the minus signs which are characteristic of all values [...] also mean 'to be accepted, reached, maintained, supported' and 'to be avoided, eliminated, changed in the positive direction'" (Köhler 1944, 206).

is implied in this word, but not in the term ‘value’” (Köhler 1939, 336). He also argues that “requiredness means that vectors issuing in parts of certain contexts extend beyond these parts and refer to other parts with a quality of acceptance or rejection” (ibid., 98), and that “[r]equiredness differs strikingly from other forms of reference by its demanding character” (ibid., 337). The gestalt involved in experiences of requiredness seems to comprise at least part of the nature of the object we confront in such cases or incorporate qualities or characteristics of the object. We see this in quotes such as “the percept [...] has qualities which make it valuable. But [...] no such quality alone constitutes actual value” (Köhler 1944, 210) – only their gestalt or the requiredness that this supposedly issues do this. Similarly, he writes that when one says that requiredness that issued by an object of value is “felt to spring from the nature of those objects and their values” what is meant is that “we are attracted by objects which have certain characteristics, and that we are disgusted [*sic*] by others” (ibid., 207). No clue, however, is offered as to what these properties, qualities, or characteristics may be and how they actually relate to the gestalt and to requiredness. Instead, he simply notes that “[t]hese qualities as such we have decided not to discuss” (ibid., 210).

Moreover, in his objectivist theory of values, Köhler (1939, 78) insists that, in our contact with realities and situations in the phenomenal field, value as requiredness is issued – clearly – from them due to what resides within them: “Everywhere value-qualities are found residing in such objects as characteristics of them. [...] Just as objects are round or tall, events slow or sudden, so some have charm, some are ugly by themselves, independently”. For example, while playing a melody, a note played after another note will either fit or not fit the context. On this, Köhler says that when a context (i.e., a gestalt) forms, a vector develops in it “and definite objects are either accepted or rejected as completions” (ibid., 96). It can thus “hardly be doubted that [...] these terms refer, phenomenally, to something in the tones [i.e., among the parts of the whole], not in ourselves.” Elsewhere, Köhler (1944, 206) asserts that in actual experience it is first of all value in an *object* which goes with a demand,” which means that “*the vector issues from the object* qua valuable. The dangerous object threatens, the cool drink is tempting, the problematic situation invites closer inspection, and so forth” (second emphasis added).

Finally, Köhler does not clearly distinguish values from meanings. On this point, he contends that “there are always the same remarks about the necessity of distinguishing between questions of solid fact [...] and problems of value, of

meaning" (Köhler 1939, 3). In his 1944 paper, he adds that he understands this vector of requiredness as a "rational or understandable relationship [...] experienced within actual mental situations" (Köhler 1944, 207) and that "the factual datum to which the value characteristic of a situation refers tends to be a structural or relational trait of this situation" (ibid., 206). Values are thus 'structural or relational traits' of objects or situations. In other words, they are *gestalts* or meanings (i.e., forms or patterns of unification of parts in the relevant wholes), which have a demanding character or exert requiredness on us and call us to take this or that stance or action toward them (e.g., flee from or pursue them). This understanding of *gestalts* in terms of meaning is generally well documented in Gestalt theory as a whole. Köhler (1992, 69), for instance, notes that "among the genuine sensory data there can be nothing like objects. Objects exist for us only when sensory experience has become thoroughly imbued with meaning." In the same vein, Pillsbury (1933, 484ff.) writes that "[t]he figure of the square is one meaning of the group of four lines [...]. It is what they mean for us over and above the bare four lines themselves" and that "[e]xactly what a *gestalt* is has never been clearly stated. [...] Ehrenfels suggested that it was [...] the meaning that four dots assumed when they were approximately at the corners of a square".

Also, those inspired by Köhler's Gestalt theoretical analysis of values discuss values and requiredness in terms of meaning. Fuller (1990, 91), for instance, suggests that "[a] *gestalt* not only always and already has meaning, it always and already is meaning, immediately what it is as the organization of its sensible members," and that "[v]alue [...] is meaning in its external requiredness, a whole of meaning positively or negatively required in its place within a context of significance. [...] [A] *gestalt* is value itself" (ibid., 138). Gibson (2015, 129), on the other hand, posits this relation as follows:

The Gestalt psychologists recognized that the meaning or the value of a thing seems to be perceived just as immediately as its color. The value is clear *on the face of it*, as we say, and thus it has a physiognomic quality [...]. Each thing says what it is.

As an example of this, he explains: "a fruit says 'Eat me'; water says 'Drink me'; thunder says 'Fear me'; and a woman says 'Love me'" (ibid.), to which he immediately adds that "Koffka did not believe that a meaning of this sort could be

explained as a pale context of memory images or an unconscious set of response tendencies” (ibid., 130).

4.2 Critical Points

The passages above yield the impression that Köhler has touched upon something very interesting. However, what he is doing constantly slips from his hands and only confusing fragments of it actually find their way into the text. In fact, Gestalt theory claims that there is a first ‘vectoral’ dimension or event that exerts demands *within* the context of the parts of the gestalt whole, which then, somehow, also happens to exert a second vectoral demand (clearly *upon us* this time). The first-level vector of requiredness can be recognized as concerning the well-formedness or *Prägnanz* of the structured whole as gestalt or meaning. That is, it has to do with what is known as laws of the good gestalt. On one level, requiredness functions on the parts of the gestalt in its structuredness. The pertinent fitting of this part with the rest of the parts in the gestalt issues a positive requiredness. To whom? Supposedly, it is objective and concerns the parts themselves (however, I would say that, ultimately, it somehow depends on us experiencing the actual or potential satiation of that requiredness). On another level, the gestalt exerts a second positive or negative requiredness on us. Concerning what? The available descriptions do not make this explicit. Köhler does not clearly state how these two levels of exerted requiredness are differentiated: recognition of a gestalt in its well-formedness, on the one hand, and ‘issuing’ or exertion of a requiredness by which we accept or deny the gestalt, on the other. It is as if Köhler trusts that the analysis of the well- or not-well-structured gestalt formation in the given perceived thing (e.g., a human face) that exerts the supposed positive or negative requiredness on the subject can somehow *by itself* solve the problem of what the second requiredness may involve (i.e., of what value is). But I believe we have reasons to doubt this.

For example, given the gestalt of a melody, it is one thing to experience its well-formedness, but another to experience some aesthetic value in it. Or consider the gestalt of a person’s face. *When or under which* circumstances or *on which* presuppositions is it recognizable as being (a) a face of a person, (b) a long or short, a fat or thin face, etc., (c) a face that is sad, angry, tired, young, sick, healthy, etc., or even (d) a face that is harmonious or disharmonious, charming, beautiful, etc.?

Someone who would like to save Köhler's analysis could argue that an angry face has a specific grimace or 'style' e.g., brows raised with a certain angle, lips tightened, eyes open, etc. Of course, this would move beyond Köhler's analysis. But let us suppose that we amend the analysis thusly. We should reply that this is a specific style in a general facial gestalt, but it at most makes the face look 'angry.' However, 'being angry' is not yet a *value* experienced in a face. Nor would we experience such a value even if we were to recognize a 'threatening' or 'fearsome' character in the facial expression. To be threatening is to display or express threat. To be fearsome is to display or express fearsomeness. *By themselves*, these characteristics are still facts, or factual characteristics, which will from now on be understood as *meanings* (see section 5 below). In the case of melodies, characteristics on the same level would include those of, say, harmony, complexity, dynamism, robustness, or even melancholy, joyfulness, etc. We *would* have recognized a value in the proper sense only if we were, somehow, to experience, in the case of the face, for instance, 'dangerousness' or (potential) '*harmfulness*' in it. In the case of a melody, values proper would include elegance, charm, beauty, or even sublimity. For this new level of experience to settle on the corresponding gestalts, objects, or states of affairs, *another* level of comprehension is required.

Meanwhile, the situation could become even worse, and this is decisive. For instance, if (potential) harmfulness is comprehended on a face with an 'angry' or 'threatening' grimace, then what common structural or relational characteristic *within* the gestalt can we ever find among this grimace gestalt and a host of other (potentially) *harmful* things, situations, ideas, or whatever else (e.g., a gun, an avalanche, smoking, totalitarianism)? As we will see, the willingness to address this ultimate challenge may also harbor a way out of the current predicament.

In order to prepare this move, though, we should stress that, in sum, Köhler does not offer a solution to the issue. For example, a musical note demands that it be followed by such and such possible notes in, say, an A-minor melody. Thus, the melody itself raises a demand that it be accepted as having one or another positive or negative value. On the first level, requiredness is raised by one part of a gestalt in the name of fittingness *vis-à-vis* its place in a recognized context. We are not given any clue, however, as to *in the name of what* and *vis-à-vis which context* the second-level demand is raised as a positive or negative requiredness (*qua* value) that is exerted on us by the gestalt. This is understandable in Köhler, since he thinks that the 'secret' abides within the gestalt *itself*. All these ideas certainly need further

analysis.³⁶ And, given that we do not yet have such an analysis, it seems urgent that we begin with one as soon as possible.

5 Disentangling Values from Meanings, Gestalts, and Requiredness

5.1 Retrieving the Thread

In his *De Anima*, Avicenna posits this problem: how does an animal (e.g., a sheep) become aware of a potential harm (e.g., a wolf) and respond accordingly (e.g., flees) when one appears? In his analysis, he claims that apart from the Aristotelian *sensus communis*, which is capable of recognizing common sensibles (e.g., a wolf's overall shape or form – a gestalt!), there must also be a capacity by which the animal gains awareness of what he notoriously calls (in its Latin translation) “*intentio*” (*ma ‘nâ*) or “intentions of the sensibles” (*ma ‘ânî al-mahsâsât*), i.e., “properties which are not essentially material, but which nonetheless adhere or attach to sensible forms and can be perceived through them” (Black 1993, 220). Avicenna's idea, then, is that, given its function, this special inner sense should bear the name *vis aestimativa* or *aestimatio* (*wahm*). In his canonical texts, his favorite examples are “the sheep's perception of hostility or harmfulness [*sic*] in the wolf,³⁷ or its perception of its offspring as an object of love” (Black 1993, 220). Avicenna clearly implies that perception of the form or shape/gestalt of an object and estimative apprehension of ‘intentional properties’ of the thus-formed objects are two different things. In the first conception of this idea, however, the newly discovered element shines forth only in order to sink back again in confusion. Harmfulness and friendliness – not beneficialness – but also pleasantness, painfulness, lovable-ness, etc., are mentioned. From the point of view set out in

³⁶ Nor do the analyses that Köhler (1939, 336f.) develops later in the book concerning the four laws of requiredness offer any further guidance on this.

³⁷ It is interesting that, in a very similar context and clearly inspired by Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas (1952, q. 78, art. 4) refers to “*intentio*” as that which a bird recognizes in the straws that it collects in order to build its nest. This brings us very close to Gibson's affordances.

section 4, then, Avicenna's analysis suffers from confusing factual characteristics or meanings with *values* proper.³⁸ It remains, however, a delicate discussion of our problem.

5.2 Outline of an Alternative Approach

In a nutshell, the way in which I believe we can make better sense of the above-mentioned problems and move toward some solution is the following. First of all, we need to reach the *core* phenomena in which meaning and value are involved: that is, the elementary level of relevant life functions, on top of which the more complex meaning and value phenomena of concrete individual and collective life are built. I think that this core should be sought in the simplest vital relations between organisms and their environments. For reasons of simplicity, I will restrict myself here to cases in which we see the emergence of conscious feelings and emotive responses. As a core example, let us consider a sharp object that is quickly approaching an organism capable of visual perception. The object has the potential to destroy at least the outer tissue of the organism and is for this reason harmful. What happens then? And what can we say about it? A recent neuroscientific finding shows that, in humans, appearance of fear and preparation for fleeing from harm take place on a level of neurological connectivity that does *not* yet involve cortical regions in the brain (i.e., conscious perceptual experience of objects; see, e.g., LeDoux 1995; 2014). Perceptual (visual) 'stimuli' that have only reached perceptually relevant, intra-thalamic sub-structures can trigger the amygdala and give rise to the conscious emotion of fear. On this level of an organism's *pre-conscious* sensory contact with its natural surroundings, elements of these surroundings can already give rise to conscious emotions. I take it that such emotions arise *vis-à-vis* beings and situations that are somehow recognized as potentially harmful for a living

³⁸ This is also reflected in the relevant discussion of Avicenna's core idea (see, e.g., Hasse 2000). Also apparent in this literature is the aforementioned conflation of Avicenna's "intentional properties" with *meaning*: "[intention is] an indicator pointing to the significance or meaning of an image with which this indicator is connected. In the example of the wolf, the sheep perceives the form or outer appearance 'wolf' plus the 'intention' 'bad' or 'disagreeing' or 'harmful' or 'hostile', then forms a judgement about it and flees" (ibid., 131).

agent in general. And I interpret this as implying that meaning and values are also involved – even if in a nascent manner – in mere animality.

With this in mind, let us return to our example and make it more specific. Suppose that a needle approaches our skin. Applied here, the neurological theory above suggests that, even if I do not consciously recognize the needle as such, I will feel fear. Needles are pointed things that can prick the skin and give rise to pain.³⁹ On an organismal level, this is the *meaning* of the needle approaching my skin. Generally, then, meaning is the way in which elements of reality are first (tactually, visually, etc.) registered in the organism according to what they sensorially are to it and what they physiologically or feelingly do to it. Organisms are equipped with specific mechanisms that are sensitive to a series of effects that elements of reality can have on them. Meaning on this level is the series of these effects on the organism, given its specific constitution, function, and capacity for interacting with the environment. Furthermore, damage to tissue can cause bleeding, inflammation, sickness, or other serious dysfunctions and, generally, poses a threat to the organism's well-being or survival. On an organismal level, this is the 'meaning' of the aforementioned meaning. And this is what I suggest we call *value* in the fullest and most accurate sense of the term. Generally, then, value is the way in which the above-mentioned meanings matter or weigh for the organism. And this mattering or weighing acquires its sense only given the *instrumental or telic prospects* of the organism, which, in the longer term, also define the organism's life and fate.⁴⁰ In our example, what induces or can induce pain is potentially *harmful* for the organism's tissues and its physiological and functional well-being.

Higher-level organisms, specifically human beings as *reflecting mammals*, may also feel fear in response to a needle that is perceptually recognized as such, upon seeing a bear in the woods, when one is a passenger on a bus with broken brakes, or when one thinks of or imagines being found guilty of fraud at trial, etc. Suitably adapted, the distinction we introduced applies here, too. In the most general terms, meaning is what an element of reality is or does *to me*; value is the way in

³⁹ Empirical research will help us to reasonably hypothesize whether the pricking of the tissue of an organism is, all the way down to the simplest organism, phenomenally lived-through or not: i.e., if phenomenal experience of pain arises in all organisms or only in organisms of a certain complexity.

⁴⁰ Elsewhere, I have already called this a 'salvational' plan or project (see Theodorou 2016).

which this meaning matters *for* me. The subtly different expressions 'to me' and 'for me' can be used to distinguish between meanings and values on the level of description. The first expresses a fact, whereas the second expresses the way (positive or negative) something factual matters *vis-à-vis* the perspective of an agent's bio-functional (for simple organisms) or bio-existential (for humans) prospects.⁴¹

I will end this section by noting that I, too, approach values in terms of a *vectoral* analysis.⁴² The way I do this, however, is totally different from that of the Gestalt theorists. As I see it, the value vector is not issued by the gestalt (object) toward the subject. Rather, (a) it is constituted on behalf of (not always *by*) the subject, (b) it originates in the factual relatedness or meaning that connects an object or state of affairs (or some elements of it) to the organism that confronts it, and (c) it is directed to the subject's future state, its bio-organismal and praxio-existential possibilities. In addition, we can now recognize requiredness as an *orectic* state involved in the emergence or experience of values and as another vector within such experience. It is not, however, a pull emanating from a state of affairs, dragging the subject toward it, but a push that arises (unconsciously or consciously) within the organism and motivates it to act in a way that brings it closer to or further away from a future state or possibility.

6 Values, Culture, and History

Now that we have an outline of a new theory of values, we can finally return to the issues of culture and meaning in history and understand – 'suspiciously' this time – the complicated processes by which we acquire patterns of ways to recognize, estimate, and act in the becoming world (i.e., ways to historically confront reality from within a culture). Values provide the flesh to the skeleton of perceptual

⁴¹ The space that separates these levels of meaning- and value-constitution, from the elementary level up to the self-aware subject and concrete person in its various forms and frames of co-existence with others, cannot be presented here.

⁴² I reached this idea sometime in March 2014 when, disappointed by traditional phenomenological views and with a background in physics, I tried to approach the phenomena of value anew. I only became acquainted with the above-presented Gestalt theoretical notion of vectoral analysis in October 2018. However, my perspective on vectoral analysis differs from those of Köhler and Lewin.

or otherwise interpreted reality as well as ways to cope with it, which will be most relevant to the variously formed collectives of co-existing humans (e.g., families, clans, etc.), but also, at least to some degree, to other primates.⁴³ And, since relatively similar ‘skeletons’ can be fleshed out – appropriately or otherwise – with different values, culture in the strict sense is actually this very system of values. To recall Nietzsche here, values are generally seen as replies to the question *What for?* regarding our preferences and choices in life. The organized hierarchical pattern of our answers, then, which is formed in the process of addressing this question in all aspects of human affairs, constitutes the system of values that fundamentally defines a culture. It is the roadmap that guides humans across the rough terrain of the concrete situations they confront, individually and collectively, while they project a salvational plan for themselves. As such, a system of values or a culture presupposes one major or *dominant value*, the one that determines the final (telic) for-the-sake-of-which (οὐ ἕνεκα) that ultimately determines living and acting, individually and collectively.

Primordially, values are not something that we conceive and understand, but the normative patterns that guide our estimations of what is positive and negative relative to a life’s (unreflected or reflected) bio-organismic and praxio-existential prospects. Now, given that (a) what we confront as reality changes through experience and knowledge, (b) we never typically know in advance what the long-term effects of valuing some element of reality will be, (c) we are never clear on our knowledge of what our ends are and why they are our ends, and (d) we can never fully predict the effects that our valuing will have on us, cultural formation and change are never a linear process, but rather an unstable one with clear *evolutionary* characteristics. In evolutionary phenomena, however, absolute teleology has no meaning at all, let alone a *progressive* meaning. We cannot take for granted or advocate in an absolutely convincing way any particular character for the course

⁴³ Studies show that chimpanzees may very well be capable not only of tool use, but also of gestural communication, teaching, strategic group hunting, folk physics, simple mathematical thinking, self-awareness, theory of mind, symbolic thinking, proto-religious apprehension of reality in the sense of “non-natural intentional causality (e.g., theism, luck, fate, immanent justice, deontic code, etc.) of naturally occurring events” (Bering 2001, 126). This includes perception of “self-relevant natural events, such as the death of their offspring, or the fortuitous discovery of [beneficial circumstances]” (ibid., 129), which possibly indicates that cultural formation is not an exclusively human privilege.

of cultural change in history. No induction based on the past and no predictive model for the future can be advocated in a fully rational way. As salvational projects, systems of values are not measurable or comparable on the basis of an *absolute* scale of good and bad, better and worse, etc. Of course, this does not change the fact that we are allowed, nay forced, to choose or even be proud of the culture we like most and reject other cultures as possible choices. I understand this in a manner similar to Kuhn's evolutionary view regarding paradigm change in the history of science.

But is such historicity necessary for a culture? It seems that whatever raises an organism above its merely natural (mechanical, chemotactic, etc.) interaction with reality can count as culture. Organisms that are conscious in a way that allows for meaningful and 'valueful' confrontations with reality *vis-à-vis* some future conception of themselves, combined with the possibility of habitual adaptation to these confrontations and transmission of such habits to subsequent generations, may be recognized as capable of some culturality. Culture is a matter of meaning and value mediation in an organism's gives-and-takes with reality around it in ways that lead to the transformation of this reality into a living environment or, perhaps, even a world. Elementarily, this may be achieved on the basis of instinctual or quasi-conceptual knowledge of materials and their properties, the use of tools, transmissible acquired habits for dealing with the environment (as minimal worldviews), etc. At the limit, then, historicity is not a necessary condition for culturality.

At least in the case of humans, though, cultures may also have an evolutionary historicity. On the basis of all the above, we can assume that this is due to possible changes on the levels of meaning and value. What is changeable on the level of meaning? As we suggested earlier, change here depends on what human beings are and what elements of reality they encounter or interact with. On this level, change may not only depend on the elements of reality that appear on or disappear from the face of Earth, but also on the reflective or theoretical views we have of reality. Whence, however, the changes in systems of values? If values can indeed be accounted for in terms of the way factual meanings affect or determine the bio-existential prospect of humans, then any change in the way we comprehend our praxio-existential orientedness in space and time brings about a change in the system of values (i.e., in culture). Broadly speaking, if – either in relation to changes in reality or independently in its application – our being and acting in accordance

with a system of values leads us, individually or collectively, to perdition instead of salvation, then a re-evaluation of our values is urgent! Of course, the future is uncertain and a person or people may abandon an imperfect but functioning system of values for one that appears to offer more hope of salvation but will turn out to be disastrous. Systems of values are finally judged by the degree to which the members of the societies that hold them actually conform to them and by the degree to which the systems of values actually safeguard the possibility of such a society to reach or attain its projected end.

We can see an emblematic example of a change in a system of values and, thus, in the identity of a culture due to change in situation in the case of late 19th century Japan, when the country came into contact with the advanced technology (e.g., firearms) of Western civilization. Within a few decades, a culture of honor and shame was redirected toward a culture based on work and guilt. Yukio Mishima is also a clear case of this – imperfect and not without remainders and hidden niches of the older order – cultural *metabasis*. Similar stories can be told for the transition from the Homeric to the Hesiodic world in ancient Greece, from the Roman imperium to the Christian *oikumene*, from the feudal to the bourgeois world, etc. Were all these changes made for a deterministically expectable ultimate good? Having abandoned both overt and covert dogmatic theodicies and historioidicies, the tacit presuppositions of naïve historico-cultural progressivism, we can only say one thing: μηδένα προ του τέλους μακάριζε (consider no one blessed before the end)! And if we are to take seriously post-Husserlian and post-Cassirerian analyses for our transition from the Enlightenment to the metamodern era, like those of Horkheimer and Adorno, or of Bauman, then it seems that our developing system of values has now long stopped fulfilling its salvational purpose.

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The Logic of Cultural Sense as Creative Configuration in Cassirer and Husserl

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Abstract: One of the distinguishing features of ‘cultural sense’ in both Cassirer and Husserl is that it can be relatively independent from ‘natural sense’ and, more importantly, be innovative. In both authors, this feature can be attributed to the fact that ‘cultural sense’ is generated by active, spontaneous, and creative functions or syntheses. These functions or syntheses unify components by virtue of a set of relations distinct from that which governs knowledge restricted to the ‘natural’ sphere. This distinctive set of relations is potentially infinitely plastic, insofar as it points to consciousness as a ligative possibility as such.

Keywords: Culture, Logic, Configuration, Relation, Freedom, Creativity

1 The Active, Spontaneous, and Creative Aspect of the Mental Function of Synthesis

The question of ‘cultural sense’ and of its distinct ‘logic’ affords a unique vantage point from which the active, spontaneous, and creative aspect of the constitution of sense in Husserlian phenomenology might be glimpsed with particular immediacy and lucidity. When this question is approached along the trajectory of Ernst Cassirer’s unequivocal commitment to the creative character of the overarching mental function of the human being, it engages a certain set of terms and notions which are uniquely suited for shedding light on the frequently underestimated

implications of Husserl's account of the active syntheses of consciousness.¹ In this section, we will examine Cassirer's concepts of the symbolic function and the logic of cultural sense in two key texts, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and *The Logic of the Humanities*, identify parallels in Husserl's *Active Syntheses* and *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, and bring into relief the potential of Husserl's account of active syntheses for an intentionality and a phenomenology beyond the merely descriptive.²

In the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929), Cassirer argues that the mental life of the human being is "governed and guided by one and the same fundamental spiritual [*geistigen*] function" (Cassirer 1957, 41): the symbolic function, an overarching "creative process [*Schaffensprozesses*]," which brings together and engages all of the different fundamental "energies" of the mind (*ibid.*, 91). In his view, this function is not restricted to higher orders of reasoning and their systems of conceptual signs (such as that of the "hard" sciences and of the mathematical knowledge of nature), but permeates perception and intuition as well, elevating them above the mere reception of data to its synthesis in accordance with the unique laws of spontaneous configuration distinct from those of natural configuration (*ibid.*, 52f.). While extending "vertically" from perception to understanding, the symbolic function differentiates "horizontally" into "spheres of meaning [*Sinngebiete*]," which, in turn, condition the emergence of mythical, linguistic, and logical forms: in this way, the symbolic function configures the common ground from which all of these forms spring and within which they remain rooted (*ibid.*, 81). In Cassirer's later work *The Logic of the Humanities* (published

¹ With respect to the detrimental effects of such an underestimation, see Journier (2019, especially 101 and 112): "*la subjectivité n'arrive plus à se reconnaître dans ses propres productions, qu'elle omet systématiquement le rôle constitutif et créateur qu'elle a nécessairement joué dans l'apparition des différents objets qui occupent son monde – d'où la problématique du transcendantal. [...] [Husserl] l'identifie au pouvoir originaire de production de sens que peut exercer cette vie intentionnelle, en le dissociant des niveaux inférieurs par où, en se développant plus tôt, elle a pu transiter.*"

² With respect to the imperative of reaching beyond the descriptive when it comes to the interface of phenomenology and cultural sense, see Sebastian Luft's (2012, 238) evocation of the neo-Kantian (and more specifically Natorpean) critique of Husserlian phenomenology: "Description needed to be complemented by construction. [...] [There was a] dispute over intuition versus construction as the basis for analysis with regard to the transcendental realm."

in German under the title *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* in 1942), the role and scope of the symbolic function remain the same, while it receives a new name: the “logic of the cultural sciences,” an overarching logic which overlaps with and exceeds that of mathematics and the natural sciences while enfolding them within the “mental” or “cultural” sphere (Cassirer 1961, 12).

Whether in mathematical or cultural logic, the symbolic function implements the human being’s capacity for a free and active response to natural determinism:

This definition is not taken over from the object but involves an act of the “spontaneity” of the understanding [*einen Akt der “Spontaneität” des Verstandes*]. It is a specific mode and direction of formation that leads to the world view of theoretical knowledge. Consequently, this view, in its basic traits, appears [to us] not as [something] “given,” not as a “ready-made product,” which is not somehow [*irgendwie*] [“in some way”] forced upon us by the nature of things, but as a result of free configuration [*Bilden*], which is however not arbitrary [*willkürlich*] in any respect, but determined by law through and through. (Cassirer 1957, 5; trans. mod.)

As in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, so in *The Logic of the Humanities*, Cassirer seeks to extricate the symbolic function and the logic of the cultural sciences from its conflation with a passive “reaction” or an “event” and to highlight its active character as “energy” or “activity which is *sui generis*” (Cassirer 1961, 140), the unique purpose of which is the creation and expression of the new:

[...] in the province of human existence and human culture, we suddenly encounter something new. For, diverse as they are from one another, all culture-forms [*Kulturformen*] are active expression-forms [*aktive Ausdrucksformen*]. They are not mere reactions – like blushing, frowning, or doubling of the fist – but genuine actions. They are not simply events which play themselves out within and upon us, but are, at it were, specific energies. It is through the exercise of these energies that the world of culture takes form – the world of language, art, and religion. (Ibid., 110; trans. mod.)

Indeed, Cassirer underscores that the “new” cannot be accounted for by a mere modification of the “old”: “For true ideality – that of intuitive formation

[*Gestaltung*] as well as that of theoretical concepts – always entails a productive rather than a merely receptive or imitative behavior [*Verhalten*]. It discovers something new instead of repeating something old under a different form” (ibid., 83; trans. mod.). The active forging of the genuinely new is the privileged task of the logic of the cultural sciences (including mathematics and logic in the more narrow, technical sense of the term). What sets its ‘energies,’ ‘workings,’ or operations apart from natural and strictly imitative processes is that they infuse the production of their configurations with *sense*. They do so by manifesting the “energies” of thought itself – the very “energies” that render logical constructions meaningful, that lie at the origin of what Cassirer refers to as “meaningful ‘logos’” (ibid., 112).

Taking Cassirer’s hallmarks of cultural logic as a point of departure – its activity and creativity, its freedom and novelty, its fundamentally reflective character – we are able to identify a parallel set of notions in Husserl’s writings from the 1920s and 1930s. Already in *Active Syntheses* (1920–21), the reader encounters an account of the creation of logical configurations that underscores its active and reflective character: the creation of logical configurations – of general and particular judgments and of all change in logical meaning – comes about through the kind of thinking, the creative activity of the I, which goes beyond a mere broadening of passive sense content (Husserl 2000, 59). Indeed, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, this kind of thinking is said to actively configure new judgments, and it is only in such configuration that consciousness can be said to be genuinely active in its fashioning (Husserl 1969, 166ff.). Active syntheses are part and parcel of that elusive spontaneous activity of the I which simultaneously constitutes its inalienable core and remains utterly inaccessible apart from the configurations it inaugurates:

That they are “in” the original production signifies that they are intended to in it, as a certain intentionality having the form of spontaneous activity, and more particularly in the mode belonging to the original objectivity itself. [...] This evident-making activity of consciousness – in the present case a spontaneous activity hard to explore – is the “original constitution,” stated more pregnantly, the primally institutive constitution, of ideal objectivities of the sort with which logic is concerned. (Ibid., 168)

Active syntheses configure what Husserl refers to as “ideal objects,” “objectivities belonging to the cultural world,” or “unreal mental configurations” (ibid., 21;

trans. mod.). Such configurations can be found in logic, mathematics, music, visual arts, etc. In mathematics, Husserl cites the example of the infinite manifold, explaining that its “free construction” (ibid., 95f.) requires free operation within and upon a finite manifold as it is expanded into something new (ibid., 97). Once freely constructed, the infinite manifold can become subject to choice and application (ibid., 98) and turn into a mere “playing with symbols” (ibid., 110). In music, Husserl chooses to comment upon the Kreuzer Sonata, distinguishing between its “ideal unity” and its “sensible unity,” where the former is fashioned through active syntheses out of the “realm of possible senses” (ibid., 24) and then embodied or brought to life by its reproduction as a combination of actual sounds (ibid., 21 and 155; see Breyer 2017). With regard to literature, Husserl points out the difference between the experience of hearing, which delivers the “sensible unity” of the piece through passive syntheses, and the understanding of the meaning of the piece, which is “produced from the Ego” (Husserl 1969, 56). The difference persists in the visual arts, where the painting as the “physical picture-thing” alone does not suffice for its constitution in consciousness as a “properly aesthetic object” (ibid., 21).

What sets these actively constituted objects apart from passively constituted objects is their ‘sense’ (*Sinn*) or ‘meaning’ (*Bedeutung*). While they may and do indeed feature a passively constituted component – insofar as they are imagined, heard, viewed, etc. –, it is their actively constituted component, their “sense,” that betrays their origin in a specific type of active synthesis: the “meaning function” (*Bedeutungsfunktion*) (ibid., 25). By virtue of this function, they exceed – while relying upon – objects constituted in lived experiences of original passivity, in simple association, and even in the original consciousness of time. The “meaning function” is the only one capable of generating “essentially new” kinds of logical sense (Husserl 2001, 331).

By examining Husserl’s texts through the lens of Cassirer, we are able to identify several crucial conceptual parallels and bring into relief a type of object and a type of constitution which simultaneously pose a challenge and hold out a unique promise to the phenomenology of culture. Ideal or unreal objects (mathematical, logical, artistic) and active syntheses (and more specifically, the meaning function) suggest a type of functionality or operativity on the part of the I that cannot be reduced to passively receiving the givens of nature, but rather actively transforms them in the context of a responsive encounter. And yet, in view of this potential, a question arises: what makes the symbolic function in Cassirer or

the meaning function in Husserl exceed the functions of perception, observation, remembrance, or even fantasy? In the following section, we will argue that it is the distinct set of relations that the symbolic and meaning functions employ in binding parts together into greater wholes.

2 Cultural Logic as Innovation through a Distinct Set of Relations

The key to elaborating a distinct cultural logic, for both Cassirer and Husserl, lies in the shift of focus from the cultural object to the cultural function or set of functions.³ This shift results from a closer examination of the ways in which parts of natural and cultural wholes are held together and leads to the hypothesis that the emergence of scientific and artistic configurations of the highest cognitive order is contingent upon the decisive ligative contribution of mental operations. This fundamentally ligative character of mental operations (its modalities, its laws, its origins, and its possibilities) thus comes into view as the primary focus of further logical investigations for Cassirer as well as for Husserl. The extension of this line of questioning leads both authors to acknowledge the central importance of a general theory of relations for a robust account of cultural logic (including scientific theory and artistic production), and more specifically, the urgent necessity of articulating the overlap and divergence between the ligative functional sets operative in the domains of perception, reflection, and eventually scientific and artistic discovery and innovation. When approached from the perspective of functionality, the problem of discovery and innovation compels both authors to account for the emergence of new ligative functions, and thus, of new kinds of relations indispensable for the cohesion of genuinely new cultural wholes. The next section of the article will examine this expansion of ligative functional sets.

³ Cf. Luft (2012, 275ff.; italics mine): “there is not merely *one* functional form, such as science, but [...] myth can also be thought of as such a *functional series*, and [...] there is in fact a *plurality* of symbolic forms which equally have a specific *function*, namely science, but also others, namely language, myth, religion, and art. [...] Each symbolic form has its own *way of functioning* with its own cognitive meaning, telos, and veracity. [...] The symbolic forms are to be understood as *parallel functioning series* with *their own right and their own way of functioning serving their own cognitive function*.”

For Cassirer, the primacy of the mental ligative function in the configuration of cultural wholes first becomes evident within the realm of scientific theory:

Instead of giving itself individual things and individual events, thought seeks and encompasses a totality of relations and connections; instead of material units, a world of laws opens up to it. Through the “form” of signs, through the possibility of operating with them in a definite way and combining them in accordance with fixed and constant rules, thinking’s own form, the character of its theoretical self-certainty arises. [...] Thought conquers its own proper world, the world of the idea. (Cassirer 1957, 45; trans. mod.)

In a pertinent parallel from *Substance and Function*, Cassirer argues that the superiority of scientific theory (including logical theory) consists in providing “a view of the whole [*das Ganze*] of possible ways [*Weisen*] of tying [elements] together [*Verknüpfung*]” in the form of a system, of a “general logical theory of relations,” in contrast to which the range of connections “emphasized in the naïve view of the world” is exposed as deficient (Cassirer 1923, 18; trans. mod.). Nevertheless, while exceeding the limitations of the “naïve view of the world,” the progress of logical-scientific theory remains hampered as long as it conceives of the character of its “legal code” as finite and fixed, a notion that Cassirer challenges with the notion of “ideal construction,” drawing inspiration from Locke’s mixed modes:

[...] “mixed modes” – so Locke formulates this fundamental view – arise wherever the understanding does not content itself with apprehending what already lies in inward or outward perception but from it forms new connections which belong solely to itself. For these modes there are no pre-figurations [*Vorbilder*], no originals either in sensation or in the world of real objects. (Cassirer 1957, 289; trans. mod.)

Thus, the formation of new ‘proprietary’ bonds first comes into view as the hallmark capacity of the understanding. In the case of the concept of number treated in Cassirer’s *Substance and Function*, the ordering of its elements is not something that is immediately evident in sensible impressions, but is rather something that stems from relations of thought: “The manifolds which it lays as a foundation, are not empirically available [*vorhandene*], but [rather] ideally defined concepts

[*Inbegriffe*], which are progressively constructed from an initially firmly established [*einmal festgesetzten*] beginning according to a constant rule.” (Cassirer 1923, 44; trans. mod.) Thus, it can be observed that, while Cassirer’s key insight remains the possibility of forming new bonds through understanding in view of the creation of new cultural forms, he is not yet able to articulate the source from which the ‘legal code’ of such formation might acquire the plasticity and open-endedness sufficient to fully implement its potential for innovation.

It is precisely in this regard that Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* are able to make further progress along this trajectory by capitalizing on key notions such as ‘the universal’ (*das Allgemeine*) and the ‘the whatsoever’ (*das Beliebige*). Just like Cassirer, Husserl is aware of the need to develop a “universal theory of relations” (*universale Relationstheorie*) or a “formal doctrine of relations” (*Formenlehre der Relationen*) which would stretch all the way from association in passive synthesis, to similitude and comparison, and ultimately to the realm of “objectivity in general,” a kind of configurative matrix characterized by arbitrary combinatorics of variable terms (Husserl 2001, 115f.). Husserl discovers this potential path forward through experimentation with a distinction between relations that govern states of affairs and relations that govern categories of judgment in the specific sense of functions rather than forms and subsequently placing the emphasis upon the uniqueness of categorial relations:

[...] it belongs to the essence of states-of-affairs and of categorial object-like formations in general to ground relations of this kind as well. Thus, the relations are divided into specifically categorial relations, into relations belonging specifically to the essence of categorial formations, and into non-categorial relations. (Ibid., 344)

This division allows Husserl to observe that while the functional sets of these relations overlap with regard to certain kinds of objects along a certain vector of intentionality, the functional set of relations corresponding to states of affairs is insufficient in accounting for the configuration of categorial objects and therefore points towards an expanded functional set. Indeed, “categorial objectlike formations have their peculiar forms of relations, and [...] not all objectlike formations can enter into them” (ibid.), and it is precisely the relational functionality of this categorial domain that requires further elaboration, if any whole beyond those

held together by relations of similitude and comparison is to be configured by the understanding.

Insofar as Husserl conceives of the forms and functions of the categorial domain as ‘declinations’ of its greater whole, it is the latter to which he turns in search for a relational functionality of the highest possible order. Only the greater whole of the categorial domain – its meta-form and meta-function, so to speak – is characterized by the open-endedness and variability ultimately at stake in the search for the generative power of a logic capable of discovery and innovation, whether scientific or artistic.⁴ It is for this reason that Husserl privileges it in his later works and provisionally associates it with the concepts of ‘the universal’ (*das Allgemeine*) and ‘the as such’ (*das Überhaupt*). In Husserl’s view, only this meta-object and meta-function are capable of altering the “legal code” of logical-scientific configuration and thereby releasing its full generative potential:

Thinking, in the form of the function of the “as such,” governs the entire judicative thinking of the higher level. The universal is constituted, we said, in relation to a field of openness, and with this we have already unleashed the function of the “whatsoever” [die Funktion der Beliebigkeit]. (Ibid., 353)

The ‘field of openness’ and the ‘function of the whatsoever’ thus emerge as two cardinal traits that condition the possibility of evolution in the ‘legal code’ governing the configurations of logic. For Husserl, such an evolution does indeed entail a modification of the functions of judgment from the ground up – “the whatsoever, the choosing, and correlatively the indifference also enters as a thematically formative activity into the judging itself; it also constitutes, it fashions new forms of objectlike formations, new forms of state-of-affairs and of judgment.” (Ibid.) To be clear, the arbitrary function can create novelty with two meaningfully distinct degrees of freedom. On the one hand, it is capable of selecting parts and relations of configurations preconstituted in passive syntheses and intentionally disconnecting and reconnecting them in alternative ways. On the other hand, it

⁴ With respect to this generative power, see Miettinen (2015, 359): “It was exactly Husserl’s notion of generativity that enabled him to formulate a view of human subjectivity as a ‘poietic’ being, a being that creates, transforms, and renews its own existence and its worldly conditions of possibility, culture.”

can respect the existing configuration of a given state of affairs while modifying the configuration of the judgment that is brought upon it, that is to say, while modifying the configuration of thought itself. In both cases, the arbitrary function introduces and preserves a crucial degree of independence between configurations ‘given’ in perception and intuition, and configurations ‘fashioned’ or ‘created’ by active syntheses of the understanding, thus vouchsafing the possibility of a creative intentionality within Husserlian phenomenology.

The formation of new ‘proprietary’ bonds by the understanding and the modification of the ‘legal code’ of logic by the arbitrary meta-function of the categorial domain of open circumference, in Cassirer and Husserl respectively, lead their investigations to confront the question of the origin of such capabilities. Can such an origin be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of subjectivity, or does subjectivity itself draw upon a broader reservoir of possibilities in shaping its forms and functions?

3 The Infinite Manifold of Cultural Forms and Functions

Far from claiming to provide an exhaustive answer to this question, the following section will restrict itself to examining the concept of the ‘field of possibilities’ employed by both authors, reinforce its ties to higher orders of thinking, and specify the sense in which the relational functionality of such thinking can be said to be ‘creative’ of cultural sense. On Cassirer’s account, such a field is constituted by the activities of free construction characteristic of conceptual thinking, which is essentially fluid and prospective. Indeed, for Cassirer, the originary power of conceptual thought lies in its spontaneity, which he defines as self-sufficiency in the promulgation of and adherence to its own laws of the configuration of cultural sense. For Husserl, the manifold of the possible forms of judgment and of their modifications carries the sense of the open and fluid meta-form and meta-function of the categorial domain, which springs from the creative activity of the ‘I’ and is actualized by combinatorial complexity and free configuration.

In Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the concept of the “free realm of the possible” appears in the context of a discussion of fundamental forms of connection that constitute the very core of conceptual thought:

Outstanding mathematicians have designated this fundamental form of relation as the core of the concept of number, and hence of mathematical thinking in general [überhaupt] [missing]; but it is by no means limited to this realm. It is at work in the smallest and in the largest [phenomena]: it dominates the whole of knowledge from the simplest sensuous recall [*Wiederfinden*] and recognition up to those highest conceptions of thought in which thought transcends everything that is given, in which, surpassing the mere “actuality” of things, it establishes its free realm of the possible. (Cassirer 1957, 298; trans. mod.)

The forms and functions of this “free realm of the possible” outstrip those given in perception and intuition insofar as they are part and parcel of the “free construction of the possible” (ibid., 319) of conceptual thinking itself:

[...] each newly acquired concept in developed knowledge is an attempt, an approach, a problem; its value lies not in its copying of definite objects, but in its opening up of new logical perspectives and by their means permits knowledge a new glimpse into and survey of the entirety of an entire problem complex. [...] For one of its essential tasks is not to let the problems of knowledge come prematurely to rest, but to keep them in a steady flux by guiding them towards new goals which it must first anticipate hypothetically. Here again we find that the concept is far less abstractive than prospective: it not only fixes what is already known, establishing its general outlines, but also maintains a persistent outlook for new and unknown ties. It not only takes up similarities or ensembles which experience offers it, but also strikes new bonds: it is a free line stroke that must always be attempted anew if the inner organization of the realms both of empirical intuition and of the logic-ideal objects to be brought out clearly. (Ibid., 306; trans. mod.)

Thus, Cassirer’s characterization of conceptual construction as free signifies that the specific capacities of thought remain fluid, broaden its horizons and heuristically anticipate the discovery and creation of new types of relational functions with a view of the configuration of new types of cultural forms, including the logico-scientific. Indeed, genuine innovation stems from a transformation of relational functions:

What is distinctive about the world of culture cannot be understood and described by pointing out specific distinguishing features. For the decisive change lies, not in the emergence of new features and properties, but in a characteristic change of function which all determinations undergo as soon as we pass from the animal world to the human world. (Cassirer 1961, 73)

For Cassirer, such transformations are equivalent to “renaissances” and lie within the specific power of thought which he identifies as “spontaneity” (ibid., 194). Here, spontaneity signifies the self-sufficient and free activity of thinking in accordance with a “legal code” which it creates by itself and for itself:

The comprehension, the “synopsis” of the manifold is not simply imposed upon thought by objects, but must be created [*hergestellt*] by independent activities of thought, in accordance with norms and criteria that lie within it. [...] It can no longer content itself with the ready-made configurations that come to it from the world of intuition but must begin to building a realm of symbols in full freedom, in pure self-activity [*Selbsttätigkeit*]. It constructively draws up the schemata by which and toward which it orients the whole of its world. Of course these schemata cannot remain within the vacuum of sheer “abstract” thinking. They require something that might hold them up [*Haltes*], a support – but they no longer simply receive these from the empirical world of things, but rather create them themselves. (Cassirer 1957, 284f.; trans. mod.)

Such descriptions of the capacity of conceptual thought to not only define, but also to re-define its own forms and functions leave little room for doubt with respect to Cassirer’s position on the origin of innovations in relational functionality and, by extension, in the world of cultural production. Cassirer is not only perfectly comfortable with using the fraught term ‘create’ (*schaffen*) with respect to the activities of the understanding, but also with applying it to realms as apparently different as painting and mathematics. Citing Taine’s commentary on a painting by Rubens, Cassirer underscores the self as the creative source of a new type of Flemish personality appearing in his art:

He tells us, not only that Rubens *discovered* this type [*Typus*] [typical image] of the Flemish and captured it in his art, but that he *created* it. He could not have taken it from direct observation of nature and he could not have achieved it by simple empirical comparison. [...] Rubens created it from a different source. Its prefiguration lay in himself. (Cassirer 1961, 153f.; trans. mod.)

Similarly, and as early as in *The Concept of Substance and the Concept of Function* (1910), Cassirer underscores the principal contribution of the free production of certain sets of relations by the very act of thinking to the concept of the infinite mathematical manifold:

Mathematical concepts which arise through genetic definition, through the establishment of a constructive coherence [*Zusammenhangs*] by means of thought [*gedankliche*], are different from empirical concepts, which would merely be copies of some kind of factual traits [*Züge*] of a given actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of things. [...] [I]nversely, in the former case, it is a matter of the initial creation of the manifold [*Mannigfaltigkeit*] which configures [*bildet*] the object of observation [*Betrachtung*], insofar as a systematic tying together [*Verknüpfung*] of configurations of thought [*Denkgebilden*] is brought forth [*hervorgebracht*] through a simple act of positing [*Setzung*] through progressive synthesis. Here, a genuine act of thinking [*ein eigener Akt des Denkens*], a free production of a certain coherence of relations [*Relations-Zusammenhänge*], stands in contrast with bare “abstraction.” (Cassirer 1923, 12; trans. mod.)

This account of the invention of the infinite mathematical manifold reinforces the creative role that the spontaneity of thinking plays in the configuration and re-configuration of the forms and functions of the cultural realm already glimpsed in the example of the new type of Flemish personality in a painting by Rubens. In Cassirer’s view, the infinite mathematical manifold testifies to the active implication of thought in the construction of new systems whose coherence is assured by nothing other than thinking’s own free act of production, including the production of new types of relational functions of synthesis.

In Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, the “multiplicity of possible forms [of judgements] as its ‘modifications’” (Husserl 1969, 51) refers to the aforementioned meta-form and meta-function of the categorial domain, provisionally entitled the ‘object-in-general’ (*Gegenstand-überhaupt*) or ‘something-in-general’ (*Etwas-überhaupt*). Husserl is primarily concerned with the functional aspect of this manifold, as it expressly seeks to demonstrate its “fundamental operations” and the possibility of their infinite proliferation through “ideal construction” (ibid., 52). The specifically functional interpretation of object-in-general or something-in-general renders it in terms of “principles of syntactic reconstruction and intertwining” (Husserl 2001, 338), i.e., in terms of relations that serve as laws for such synthesis. Taken together, they form a set of relational functions which are part and parcel of an “*a priori* genesis” (*apriorische Genesis*) of all possible forms of judgments in their ever-growing complexity and intertwining (ibid.). A *priori* genesis configures the forms of judgments by drawing upon a manifold of “pre-given,” but “open” functional possibilities:

Ways of modifying and of connecting forms – constructively, in reiterable operations – were given as open possibilities, ways in which one could always generate new forms from forms already given: as one does in the combinative constructing of complex judgment-forms out of simpler judgment-forms or in the free constructing of syllogistic forms out of judgment-forms. Accordingly the logician projected in advance, with formal universality, the conceivably possible forms of judgments, and of cognitions, that can be produced concretely in any conceivable province of cognition. (Husserl 1969, 41)

In this context, novelty is construed as the actualization of possibility, as the introduction of complexity through combinatorics, and even as free configuration. Thus, when Husserl speaks of the manifold as being ‘given in advance’ in formal generality, he does not therein consign it to static finitude, but rather preserves its unbounded, fluid character. Thus, relational functions such as amount (*Menge*), finite and infinite number (*Anzahl*), combination, row (*Reihe*), bond (*Verbindung*), whole and part may be “derived” or “fashioned” from the *a priori* field of open possibilities that is the object-in-general and, in turn, facilitate the rise of “new formations as products generated in a constructing that is always reiterable” (ibid.,

78). Indeed, by virtue of its unparalleled plasticity, this manifold is capable of engendering the forms and functions of cultural regions as diverse as mathematics and music. As Husserl had anticipated as early as in his *Philosophy of Arithmetics*, the open possibilities of this manifold lend themselves to the derivation of both “physical” relations (similarity, sameness, increase, continuum, metaphysical connection, connection of properties, color, extension) and “psychic” or intentional relations (representation, judgment, feeling, desire) (Husserl 2003, 74–79).

The actualization of the open possibilities pre-given as a manifold yields two types of objects – real and ideal – and their coherence is evaluated in terms of two distinct sets of criteria, to which Husserl refers as the “truth-logic” (*Wahrheitslogik*) and the “theory of sense” (*Sinneslehre*) (Husserl 1969, 130ff.). The coherence of real objects is interpreted as ‘truth’ and evaluated primarily in terms of non-contradiction and adequation to being (i.e., various degrees of correspondence to existing things). Ideal objects are exempt from the criterion of adequateness, insofar as their coherence is interpreted as ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ that does not necessarily have to adhere to a pre-existing schema in a real object. This distinction is crucial for preserving a space of conceptual difference between ‘natural objects’ and ‘cultural objects’ without rendering their respective domains and the sets of relational functions that govern them mutually exclusive. It is, after all, thanks to this space of difference that concepts of “nature” (ibid., 116) can and do evolve over the course of the history of sciences, while the natural phenomena they study remain largely the same. According to Husserl, it is for this reason that the concept of ‘nature’ cannot be said to be acquired once and for all, but rather that it continually moves forward and perpetually reshapes itself. It is the same space of difference that allows certain mathematical and artistic objects to remain reflective of existing phenomena, while certain others are configured and ‘transfigured’ largely independently from such reference, especially at the level of relational functions that bind together their elements.

As for Cassirer, so for Husserl, the sets of relational functions that define the manifolds of possible syntheses are inalienably associated with the activity proper to higher orders of thinking. Indeed, for Husserl, the operations that “produce” (*erzeugen*) or even more explicitly “create” (*schaffen*) such sets are effectuated by the “thinking actions” (*Denkhandlungen*) and are therefore situated on the subjective side of the constitutional equation (ibid., 36). Thus, the object-in-general, the meta-form and meta-function of the domain of categorial objects, is itself constituted

by conceptual thought, which operates on “a *fundamentally new and higher level*” than other forms of consciousness, which are only capable of “pre-constituting” such an object (Husserl 2001, 341). In view of the quantitative predominance of discussions of passive syntheses in Husserl, it is all the more crucial to underscore his claim that the relational functions of conceptual thought are capable of fashioning objects of a qualitatively different order, objects representative of an ‘objectivity of a new kind’ (*neuartige Gegenständlichkeit*): an ‘objectivity of the understanding’ (*Verstandesgegenständlichkeit*). While resting upon and reaching all the way down to the lower levels of consciousness,⁵ conceptual thought is not derivative of, reducible to, or accountable in terms of these levels. Rather, Husserl speaks of it as springing from the “original well-spring of activity” of the subject, the “full light of the understanding [*des Verstands*],” and the explicitly and unequivocally “creative activity of the I [*schöpferische Aktivität des Ich*]” (Husserl 2001, 351):

Here, the “S” is not given to consciousness in the manner of mere sensibility with varying content; through thinking [*Denken*], that is, thematic activity, [it] has not merely taken on expansions of its passive content of sense; but in the full light of the intellect, in the creative activity of the I [*Ich*] which gives itself over [*hingibt*] to the themata and to working for them, the creation of logical configurations [*Gebilde*] is fulfilled [*sich vollzieht*], of judgments as a whole or in particular, and thus everything that we call the alteration of logical significances. (Ibid., 331f.; trans. mod.)

The creative activity of the ‘I’ illuminated by the understanding fashions new forms and functions in accordance with its own essential legality, which surpasses that of the lower orders of consciousness and their passive syntheses. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl conceives of such creative activity in terms of the “striving of the acts of judgment” (*urteilendes Streben*) themselves (Husserl 1969, 115f.; trans. mod.). Such striving effectuates a genuine evolution of logical sense which cannot be sufficiently accounted for in terms of mere adjustments brought to sense which has been passively pre-constituted in perception or intuition: strictly speaking, the emergence of logical sense means the emergence of

⁵ Concerning the hypothesis of a “dual foundation” of logic, see Bégout (2000, especially the concluding section entitled “*Le conflit des fondements*,” 349–368).

“something new and not something connected to and intermeshed with that sensible sense.” (Husserl 2001, 331)

The preceding section analyzed the dynamic structure and role of relational functionality in the configuration of ‘cultural sense’ as creative innovation, significantly distinct from and independent of ‘natural sense.’ It traced the generative origin of such innovation to higher orders of thinking, namely, to conceptual thought operative within the understanding. It has also interpreted the terms ‘creative’ and ‘new’ as owing their significance to the capacity of conceptual thought to remain fluid and broaden its horizons, to actualize possibilities, to introduce complexity through arbitrary or free combinatorics, and most importantly, to alter its own ‘legal code’ of coherence. However, before recapitulating the configuration of ‘cultural sense’ in Cassirer and Husserl, the present investigation would be amiss not to briefly consider the implications of insights garnered upon this trajectory for Cassirer’s and Husserl’s vision of consciousness as such.

4 Consciousness as an Evolving Field of Ligative Functions

Throughout the last few sections, relational functionality has emerged as a leit-motif and versatile ‘legal code’ of the configuration of both natural and cultural sense. Its variously overlapping and diverging sets have been registered at all levels of consciousness, from sense perception to conceptual creation. What is more, both Cassirer and Husserl have highlighted the importance of drafting a general theory of relations of permeable scope and sufficient plasticity to accommodate the undeniable phenomena of evolutions in cultural thought, whether in the scientific or the artistic realms. In view of such prominence of the relational problematic, it seemed promising for the present investigation to take it one step further and inquire into whether relational functionality may characterize consciousness *a priori*, before its scission into various levels of operation and diverse regions of sense. Cassirer not only welcomes this possibility, but explicitly draws upon Dedekind for support: “The ability of the mind [...] to relate things to things, to make a thing correspond to a thing, or to configure [*ausbilden*] a thing in a thing, is a capacity without which no thinking would be possible as such.” (Cassirer 1957, 258; trans. mod.)

Thus, in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the mind gradually comes into view as a kind of operating system of relations of various forms: “it is precisely relation, because it is pure connection, that governs the building of consciousness and which stands out in it as a genuine ‘*a priori*’” (ibid., 203; trans. mod.). In Cassirer’s view, the world of the mind itself acquires its definition, its mold, its character through its fundamental ligative functions. Indeed, his commitment to this vision of the mind could not be clearer than in the following remark from *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: “Here again we take subjectivity as a whole [*Ganzes*] of functions out of which the phenomenon of a ‘world’ and its determinate order of sense [*Sinn*] is actually built up for us” (ibid., 50; trans. mod.). Cassirer’s conclusion is that it is this “whole of functions” that enables human beings to produce and not simply re-produce everything from theoretical knowledge, to language, to art:

What they seek under the name of humanity does not lie completely within the limits of the moral form. It extends to every shaping [*Gestaltung*] whatever, regardless of the particular sphere of life within which it realizes itself. Here there emerges, as the fundamental feature of all human existence, the fact that the human being is not simply lost within the fullness of external impressions, that the human being binds this fullness by giving it a determinate form, which, as such, stems in the end from the human being itself from a thinking, feeling, willing Subject. [...] This will to form [*Wille zur Form*] and this capacity for form [*Vermögen zur Form*] is what Herder and Humboldt show to be the essence of language, what Schiller points to as the essence of play and art, and what Kant shows to be true of the structure of theoretical knowledge. For them, all this would not be possible as outgrowth, as sheer product, if unique ways of producing did not underlie it. The very fact that the human being is capable of this type of productivity is precisely what stands out as the unique and distinguishing character of human beings. ‘*Humanitas*’ in the widest sense of the term denotes that completely universal – and, in this very universality, unique – medium from which alone ‘form’ can stem and in which it can continue to configure itself and flourish. (Cassirer 1961, 21f.; trans. mod.)

According to Cassirer, subjectivity as relational functionality is only able to vouchsafe creative innovation in the realm of cultural sense insofar as it continually

expands its relational capabilities: “it is not bound by a determinate and clearly delimited sphere of possibilities, indeed it must seek and create new possibilities for itself” (ibid., 37; trans. mod.). Indeed, it must discover and create new ties and bonds such that its ligative activity might go forth without retracing its steps (see Cassirer 1957, 304).

For Husserl, the path to conceiving of consciousness as a bundle of ligative functions or as a capacity for relation as such lies in the shift of emphasis from form to function. Indeed, in works immediately leading up to *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, the transcendental “I” is conceived not only as the operational center of all constitution,⁶ but specifically as “functioning subjectivity as such, in its purity [...] functioning as functioning, as accomplishing intentionally” (Husserl 1993, 69; trans. mine). In turn, this shift allows Husserl to render consciousness in terms of a “an openly endless multiplicity of possible modes of consciousness” and “self-consciousness” (Husserl 1969, 160), i.e., a bundle of relational functions. On this account, consciousness can be interpreted as the overarching relation between two sub-types of relation: the relation of consciousness to itself and the relation of consciousness to every other entity. This ‘dual processor core’ of self-reference and referentiality can then be seen as operating on different levels and different scales, with the constant of such operations being their essentially relational or ligative character. Thus, in Husserl’s later writings, such as *Experience and Judgement*, the range of ligative functions will extend from unity assured by the time of lived experience (operative within the current of internal consciousness), to unity assured by the passive synthesis of the consciousness of time (operative within the ‘lining’ of the passive field), to unity assured by the simultaneity of objectities pre-given in the field of perception (operative within observation), to unity assured by transitions between such objectities (operative within binding observation), and finally to ontological-formal unity assured by formal relations (operative at the level of predicative thought and more specifically fashioning spontaneity) (see Husserl 1973, §§ 34f., 43). Further extensions would be possible insofar as the “primeval transcendental life, which is [...] world-creating and whose last ‘I’ cannot come from nothing and go into nothing, is ‘immortal,’ because dying has no meaning

⁶ Cf. Pradelle (2017, 27): “Jamais Husserl n’a renoncé à un tel idéal, pas plus qu’au concept de constitution transcendentale ni à la thèse idéaliste selon laquelle tout étant tire son sens et son être des opérations de la conscience pure.”

for it” (Husserl 1993, 338; trans. mine). To be more precise, the meaning of the ‘immortality’ of the ‘I’ consists in its orientation towards the infinite asymptote of the possible, allowing it to draw upon its reservoir with respect to its own function.

5 Conclusion

Whether open and fluid relational functionality is conceived as the defining capacity of the human mind, as in Cassirer, or as pure functioning subjectivity, as in Husserl, it is indispensable in accounting for the emergence of a distinct and evolving set of relational functions which conditions the configuration of specifically cultural sense. While interfacing with the ligative set constitutive of ‘natural sense,’ the set that creates or fashions ‘cultural sense’ expresses the unique potential of consciousness for a *constructive response* to the *datum*: a response ranging from its plural and shifting interpretations, to anticipation and active pursuit of its discovery, to spontaneous and free configuration of *sui generis* wholes irreducible to natural or even historical precedents. It is the margin of difference between these two sets that accounts for a consciousness that not only *receives*, but also *gives* something of itself in authentically meaningful encounter.

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The Meaning of the ‘Symbolic’ and the Question of the Transcendental *Epoché*¹

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Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to examine the methodology applied by Cassirer in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, by questioning its phenomenological dimension. More precisely, we will examine the way in which Cassirer reappropriates the Hegelian meaning of phenomenology, while refusing the Husserlian one, i.e., the practice of the transcendental *epoché*. We attempt to underline the reasons, but also the difficulties of such a refusal, by focusing on two general issues: the meaning of the ‘symbolic’ and the exposition of sense formation (*Sinnbildung*). Based on a confrontation with the *Origin of Geometry*, we will thus be led to understand what makes the difference between Cassirer’s und Husserl’s philosophical projects. But we will also show, in conclusion, that Cassirer’s late work, and in particular his reflection on the *Urphänomene*, may actually allow for a rapprochement with Husserlian phenomenology.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Symbolic Form, Transcendental, Cassirer, Husserl, Hegel

1 Introduction

The starting point of this chapter is the meaning of ‘phenomenology’ in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and the way it is correlated with the meaning of the

¹ We would like to deeply thank Inga Römer and Amalia Trepca for their careful proofreading.

‘symbolic.’ We can notice that Cassirer uses the notion of ‘phenomenology’ in order to qualify three essential dimensions of his philosophy. First, a ‘descriptive phenomenology,’ whose goal is to describe phenomena as they are given to consciousness (for instance, myth is not described from an external and rational point of view, but starting from mythical consciousness itself, in order to analyze its own psychical categories). Second, a ‘critical phenomenology,’ which raises phenomena and psychical contents to the objectivity of a symbolic form by showing the transcendental legality, the particular symbolic function that constitutes it. Third, a ‘dialectical phenomenology’ in a Hegelian sense, which organizes three symbolic functions that are linked by a dialectical movement: expression, representation, and signification. These moments constitute not only the activity of the spirit – the way it develops itself by producing objectivities –, but also, and most importantly, the process of spirit’s self-manifestation. The Hegelian idea that plays an essential part in Cassirer’s thought is that the process of objectivation is also a process of manifestation. At the same time, Cassirer assumes this Hegelian meaning of phenomenology and rejects the “modern usage of the term [*den modernen Sprachgebrauch*]” (Cassirer 1957, xiv; trans. mod.). Unfortunately, Cassirer does not explain precisely the meaning of this ‘modern usage.’ We will make the assumption that Cassirer rejects, without saying it explicitly, the Husserlian method of *epoché* and transcendental reduction. The question is: why? We will see that these two meanings of phenomenology – on the one hand, the Hegelian meaning assumed by Cassirer, i.e., the objective development of the spirit and, on the other hand, the rejected Husserlian one, i.e., the reduction to transcendental subjectivity – are opposed and imply two different conceptions of culture. Our goal is to explain this resumption and this rejection, in order to discuss some difficulties of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: the meaning of the symbolic, the interpretation of culture that it implies, and the way the symbolic function as such, as the unity of the system of symbolic forms, is brought to light. We would like to contribute here to the recent development in research on the relationship between Cassirer and Husserl (Bernet 2010; Lofts 1994; Luft 2004) and especially on their respective philosophies of culture. But instead of showing the convergence towards common problems (the crisis of culture and modern rationality, for instance), we will focus our attention on the differences between them, and more precisely on the methodological ones.

Why does Cassirer exclude the Husserlian meaning of phenomenology? The most explicit critique is found in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic*

Forms (Cassirer 1957, 196–199). There, Husserl's phenomenology is accused of separating *noesis* and *hyle*, formal and material moments, in order to 'show' the pure transcendental activity of sense formation. With this critical observation, which mainly discusses *Ideas I* (§§ 85f.), Cassirer wants to show that Husserl ultimately reintroduces a substantial distinction into the phenomenal field and misses the symbolic dimension of the world. Indeed, according to the fundamental principle of PSF, the experience is neither lived through nor constituted by individual sensations or impressions, but lived as a symbolic formation, as a concrete unity of form and matter, as an embodied sense. We have tried to show in a previous essay (Watin-Augouard 2016) that Husserl does not make those real distinctions, but functional and transcendental ones – *hyle* is a "functional concept" (Husserl 1983, 205) – and that the main goal of this is to discuss the phenomenological claim of 'showing' the transcendental realization of sense itself. Furthermore, the functional status of concepts such as *hyle* and *noesis* cannot be understood without reference to the phenomenological reduction or the *epoché*. However, Cassirer does not mention the fundamental phenomenological method explicitly in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Certainly, he mentions it in the fourth and unpublished volume, *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen*, but only in order to criticize the monadic perspective, the reduction to transcendental subjectivity, and to emphasize the orientation towards exteriority.² But our hypothesis is that the reduction may be practiced otherwise, and that subjectivity itself may be 'put into brackets,' so that the critique of the Cartesian way does not directly question the phenomenological reduction as such,³ nor the conception of a transcendental *field*. Indeed, Cassirer's interpretation of the transcendental still remains within the framework of Kantian and critical philosophy: reflection could only exhibit the formal and material conditions of possibility of experience, but not explore it as a sphere that would be separated from experience and from the objects constituted in experience, which would imply a specific kind of phenomenality and thought. It is this meaning of a phenomenal field, which precedes any

² "Die Erkenntnistheorie nimmt eine neue Wendung, sobald sie über das monadische Grundschema hinausgreift, sobald sie sich, gegenüber der monadischen Innen-Wendung zur radikalen Außen-Wendung entschließt" (Cassirer 1995, 179).

³ As it has been shown by Patočka's asubjective phenomenology, or, more recently, by Marc Richir.

objectivity and is opened by ‘putting into brackets’ the positivity of the objects, that we will use in order to qualify Husserl’s conception of transcendental, beyond the *aporias* that have led him to identify this field with subjectivity. We can assume, therefore, that Cassirer refuses the phenomenological reduction because, according to him, it would be an illusion to pretend to claim to have access to this transcendental field without the objective mediation of the cultural world. For this objective medium, as a symbolic one, would be able to manifest a transcendental activity of sense formation (*Sinnbildung*).⁴ We would like to analyze this position in order to show that it reveals two difficulties. A first one concerns the system of symbolic forms itself and its unity. To put it briefly, we think that the methodology used by Cassirer implies a confusion between, on the one hand, the symbolic form as an objectivity that is already made and, on the other hand, the symbolic function or the *Sinnbildung* as such, whose philosophical exposition is, therefore, very problematic. The second difficulty concerns the meaning of culture: while Cassirer considers it as a symbolic field, that is to say as an activity of the spirit that would express itself in the objective world, Husserl shows the deep ambiguity of culture, which is both a sediment or a concealment of this activity and its active expression. This ambiguity would result from a gap that should be reduced, between the symbolic and the transcendental field – a gap that Cassirer does not take into consideration.

First, we have to explain the fundamental phenomenological position adopted by Cassirer, which excludes any *epoché*. Then, we will develop the difficulties to which this position leads by a confrontation with Husserl’s *Crisis of European Sciences* and especially with the *Origin of Geometry*.

2 The Objectivation of Spirit as its Expression (*Ausdruck*)

First, we have to present and explain the phenomenological perspective adopted by Cassirer. From a general standpoint, which includes both the Hegelian and

⁴ We translate *Sinn* by ‘sense’ and not by ‘meaning,’ because ‘meaning’ is more relevant to linguistic or logic contexts (as *Bedeutung*), while ‘sense’ expresses more generally the way the world is lived, and not only designed by language.

the Husserlian projects, we could say that the phenomenological task is an attempt to return to the spirit taking its works, the products of its activity, as the starting point. This return means at the same time to awaken the spirit, to divert it from a natural and naïve attitude, in which it considers the world of perception, culture, or history as an objectivity in which it does not recognize itself, i.e., in which it does not recognize its dynamism, its own creative activity of formation (*Bildung*). But once this general goal is set, a fundamental difficulty arises, which is due to the status of objectivity and spiritual production. This difficulty first appears as an alternative: either we consider objectivity as an alienation (*Entäußerung*) of the spirit, as a static result: an oversight of the fundamental dynamism of the spirit considered as pure *Bildung*, free activity; or we consider, on the contrary, this objectivity as an expression (*Ausdruck*) of the spirit that it is the only medium through which the spirit manifests itself. In this latter case, we consider the objective world as a dynamic movement. We can see the risks presented by each of these options: if objectivity is an alienation that must be overcome, the problem comes from the status of *Bildung* and from its understanding: how can we grasp a pure activity and what are we grasping concretely? This is the problem of the transcendental field, which – being necessarily placed beyond the empirical field – remains problematic in terms of its concreteness, even if its necessity has been established. Furthermore, what does it mean to overcome alienation? Does it mean that the empirical must be neutralized, and if so, to what concreteness would philosophical discourse still be linked? Conversely, if we consider objectivity as an expression of the spirit, does this not lead to a leveling of the distinction between activity and its result, between *Bildung* and *Bild*? Does the idea of the 'transcendental' still make sense? This alternative may seem schematic, since it does not present the *nuances* that intervene in the development of a philosophical position; but at least it has the merit of situating Cassirer's philosophy as a phenomenology in relation to Hegel and Husserl. At the same time, it allows us to grasp the fundamental difficulty of the philosophy of symbolic forms, a difficulty that we believe is crystallized in the concept of the 'symbolic' as *spirit's expression*.

How does Cassirer fit into this alternative? An answer is given at the end of the introduction to the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – an answer which is, however, far from being obvious and definitive:

The more richly and energetically the spirit engages in its formative activity, the farther this very activity seems to remove it from the originary source [*Urquell*] of its own being. More and more, it appears to be imprisoned in its own creations [*Schöpfungen*] – in the words of language, in the images of myth or art, in the intellectual symbols of cognition, which cover it like a delicate and transparent, but unbreachable veil [*Schleier*]. But the true, the profoundest task of a philosophy of culture, a philosophy of language, knowledge, myth, etc., seems precisely to consist in raising this veil [*diesen Schleier aufzuheben*] – in penetrating from the mediate sphere of mere meaning and designation [*Bedeutens und Bezeichnens*] to the originary sphere of intuitive vision. (Cassirer 1955a, 113; trans. mod.)

Let us return to the thread of this text, in order to identify its articulations and above all to clarify the issue at stake. Cassirer first considers the possibility that the works of culture are like a ‘prison’ of the mind. The whole problem is that the mediation that these productions represent would be a ‘veil,’ which hides pure creative activity and which is therefore inaccessible as such. The spirit seems to be a ‘prisoner of its own creations’ insofar as ‘words,’ ‘images,’ and ‘symbols’ introduce a deviation from its activity. Cassirer thus formulates, by contrast, the goal that the philosophy of culture should pursue: to reach the immediacy of pure creation, at its origin, by an ‘intuitive vision.’ This hypothesis of the alienation of the spirit through its works consists here in the opposition between mediation and the immediate, and not, for example, between a static and a dynamic dimension. Cassirer considers that the problem stems not from objective mediation as such, but from a certain relationship to culture, in which the subject would stand up to external symbolic determinations, preceding or even conditioning the very thought of the subject. Consequently, the argument that allows him to reject this first alienating approach to culture consists in attacking the illusion of pure immediacy:

To philosophy, which finds its fulfillment only in the sharpness of the concept and in the clarity of “discursive” thought, the paradise of mysticism, the paradise of pure immediacy, is closed. Hence, it has no other solution than to reverse the direction of inquiry. Instead of taking the road back,

it must attempt to continue forward [*ihn nach vorwärts zu vollenden*]. If all culture is manifested in the creation [*Erschaffung*] of specific spiritual image-worlds [*bestimmter geistiger Bildwelten*], of specific symbolic forms, then the aim of philosophy is not to go behind all these creations, but rather to understand and elucidate their basic formative principle [*gestaltenden Grundprinzip*]. (Ibid., 113; trans. mod.)

We cannot ignore the mediation of 'meaning' and 'designation,' since the only tool available to philosophy is precisely the concept and its discursiveness. Any other attempt to grasp the activity of the mind is ultimately only a 'mysticism' based on an illusory intuition. The first opposition between mediation and immediacy is therefore enriched by two others: on the one hand, the opposition between discursiveness and intuition, and, on the other hand, that between 'rigor' or 'clarity' and mystical illusion. The approach of immediate intuition being thus put out of play, Cassirer can expose the principle of his philosophy drawing entirely on the objective mediation of the works of the spirit, which allows to bring out the spiritual energy. This is precisely the task of the phenomenology that Cassirer wants to develop in implicit contrast to Husserl. If Cassirer examines the alienation hypothesis, it is not so much in order to clarify a problem as to expose his fundamental methodological position. What might seem to be a problem is turned by Cassirer into a methodological position: instead of wanting to go behind the veil of objectivities to tear it apart, we have to start from the creations of the spirit, we have to "situate ourselves in the middle of its activity," in order to see the activity at work, and forget any "originary source" – which would be utopic if we consider the sole means available to philosophy: "the sharpness of the concept and the clarity of 'discursive' thought." (Ibid.) Therefore, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* considers the objectivation of the spirit not as its alienation, but as its expression, which philosophy must exhibit as "roads by which the spirit proceeds towards its objectivization [*Objektivierung*], i.e., its self-revelation [*Selbstoffenbarung*]." (Ibid., 78; emphasis added) This fundamental position implies a first difficulty that concerns the historical dimension of culture, and this is what we will be looking at in the following section.

3 The Symbolic Form: Between Sense Formation and Sense Sedimentation

3.1 The ‘Universal A Priori of History’

It seems that Cassirer did not consider the passive dimension inherent in the cultural world and in the objectivities that constitute it, which are not only expressive, but also sedimented. We think that the reason for this is that the meaning of “symbolic” is deeply linked to a historicization of the transcendental and that Cassirer misses what Husserl had seen in *The Origin of Geometry* as a “universal a priori of history,” i.e., “the vital movement of the coexistence [*Miteinander*] and the interweaving [*Ineinander*] of originary formation and sedimentation of sense [*ursprünglicher Sinnbildung und Sinnsedimentierung*]” (Husserl 1970, 371; trans. mod.). Briefly put, it is not certain that the process of objectivation is necessarily a process of manifestation, it might just as well be a process of concealment. The consideration of these two aspects must lead us to question the meaning of Cassirer’s symbolic form.

In this text, as it is well-known, Husserl does not only deal with geometry or geometrical problems, but with the “deepest sense problems [*Sinnesprobleme*],” which are linked to two essential questions concerning our issue: on the one hand, the question of “universal history in general” (what is historic? what are the essential marks of what is historic?); and, on the other hand, the issue of “the meaning, method, and beginning of philosophy” (ibid., 354). These two questions are inseparable: the way we understand the historic development of the spirit implies the philosophical method we will employ in order to explain the emergence of sense and, consequently, it implies the meaning given to sense formations (*Sinngebilde*). The “regressive inquiry” (*Rückfrage*) from the “ready-made, handed-down geometry” to its “originary institution” (*Urstiftung*) leads Husserl to the following question: how do produced forms (*Gestalten*) acquire an ideal objectivity, how are they instituted in the totality of a culture, under the form of a “persisting acquisition” (ibid., 359)? Without going into the details of Husserl’s analysis, we can note that the process of objectivation is made possible by three steps: (1) the temporality of retention and the possibility of a recollection (*Wiedererinnerung*), (2)

the intersubjectivity of the "community of empathy [*Einfühlung*] and of language" (ibid., 360), and (3) a process of sedimentation (*Sedimentierung*) that is specific to language, to the documentation (*Dokumentierung*) of linguistic expression. These three steps lead to a "conversion [*Verwandlung*] of the originary mode of being of the sense figure [*Sinngebilde*]" (ibid., 361; trans. mod.): this sense, lived in an actual and active evidence, gives rise to passive associations. Once the originary institution belongs to the past and yet persists in the form of linguistic acquisition, available in a community, its mode of being is changed, so that the originary activity is followed by a passive donation. We, members of a social and historical community, did not create all the meanings that prevail in this community. And the first condition for having access to these meanings, as ideal and intersubjective objectivities, is the sedimentation. An important passage from Husserl's text will allow us to better understand the difference to Cassirer and his conception of symbolic form:

It is easy to notice that even in human life, and first of all in every individual life from childhood up to maturity, the originally intuitive life which creates its originally evident formations through activities on the basis of sensitive experience, falls [*verfällt*] very quickly and in increasing measure for the deviation of language [*der Verführung der Sprache*]. Greater and greater segments [of this life] lapse into a talking and reading that is dominated purely by associations; where after it is quite often disappointed, in the acceptances [*Geltungen*] thus acquired, by subsequent experience. Now one will say that in the sphere of science that interests us here, [the sphere] of a thinking directed toward the attainment of truths and avoidance of falsehood, one will be greatly concerned from the start to put a stop to the free play of associative formations [*Bildungen*]. Such formations remain a constant danger, under the unavoidable sedimentation of spiritual products [*Erzeugnisse*] in the form of persisting linguistic acquisitions, which can be first taken up and taken over, merely passively, by anyone else. (Ibid., 362; trans. mod.)

The expression that interests us most of all is 'the unavoidable sedimentation of spiritual products.' Husserl considers that the historical dimension of culture (temporality, intersubjectivity, linguistic documentation) is deeply ambivalent.

Certainly, it is always possible to reactivate the original evidence that commands the *Urstiftung* and to read or generally to actively understand a cultural meaning. Certainly, it is also possible to create new productions – a tradition is also constituted by “lively [...] sense formation” (ibid., 365; trans. mod.). However, this activity is not a necessity, but a possibility, accompanied by the passivity of sedimentation that threatens all culture as tradition, namely as a danger of becoming a “tradition empty of sense [*sinnentleerte*]” (ibid., 366; trans. mod.). The essential idea is that this danger is not an external one threatening culture from outside, but immanent to it. It is not certain that writing is the only component responsible for the falling of activity into passivity, according to Husserl. Indeed, he speaks of the ‘deviation of language’ – and language cannot be reduced to writing. Furthermore, sedimentation is constitutive of the process of objectivation, which is itself constitutive of culture. It is this ambivalent character of culture – being, on the one hand, a creation of new sense formations and, on the other hand, a sedimentation of significations – implied by its historical dimension, and by the ‘universal a priori of history’ that Cassirer did not seem to have seen and that brings into question one of the most fundamental principles of his philosophy: the assumption that the objectivation of spirit is a process of self-manifestation.

3.2 Symbolic Form and Symbolic Function

How can Cassirer justify this principle? It supposes first that there is no separation between objectivities and the transcendental function that constitutes them. Indeed, the very famous definition of ‘symbolic form’ given in the article entitled “The Concept of Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences” is explicit: the symbolic form is a spiritual activity.

By “symbolic form” one should understand every energy of the spirit [*jede Energie des Geistes*], by which the content of spiritual meaning [*geistiger Bedeutungsgehalt*] is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign. In this sense, language, the mythical-religious world, and art confront us as particular symbolic forms. All of them bear the mark of a fundamental phenomenon [*Grundphänomen*]: our consciousness does not content itself with receiving an impression from the outside, rather it links

and penetrates every impression with a free activity of expression [*freien Tätigkeit des Ausdrucks*]. (Cassirer 2013, 76; trans. mod.)

We think that this definition is problematic, because it immediately levels the difference between activity and result, between the process of objectivation and the objectivities that are produced. It is this starting point that allows Cassirer to propose a phenomenology that consists in pursuing the historical development of the spirit. This development is, just like the expression into culture and history of a transcendental activity, a synthetic and schematic one. But this activity is not separate from the diversity of symbolic forms, and it even risks being confused with determined and positive objectivities. This point is very clear in the following passage, from “*Symbolbegriff: Metaphysik des Symbolischen*”:

On the other hand, the fundamental starting point of our approach is that the separation [*die Trennung*] between any positive-given being [*irgendeinem positiv-gegebenen Sein*] and the spiritual functions that are subsequently linked to this material cannot be carried out [*undurchführbar ist*]. We do not have “being” – whether metaphysical or psychological – before spiritual action [*geistigen Tun*] and independent of it, but always only in and with this action. The mere thought of separating the two from each other, of placing and opposing a pure passive “givenness” [*Gegebenheit*] before spiritual “activity” [*Aktivität*] is misleading. Apart from action and its different directions (in language, myth, religion, art, science) there is no form of being for us, because there is no form of determination [*Bestimmtheit*]. (Cassirer 1995, 261)

Cassirer takes up a theme already developed in the introduction of the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: “being can only be grasped [*erfassbar*] here in action [*im Tun*]” (Cassirer 1955a, 78). But the essential question must be: what is the nature of this action? We know that it is a functional activity of the spirit (*Geist*), or of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), but it is never separated from a ‘positive-given’ being. Therefore, we presume that there is always a risk, a permanent danger, either of letting this ‘spirit’ unquestioned as such, or of predetermining it from a positive and determined being. In other words, the attempt to grasp being through action runs the risk of reversing itself, of grasping the action through being. A good example of this situation is given to us in the analyses devoted to the

function of expression, the first spiritual manifestation, which is particularly interesting because it takes place before any objectivities, as a pre-objective schematism. The methodological question that arises is the following: how can we grasp this originary function if it exceeds any objective determination?

The sense [*Sinn*] and content of the pure expressive function as such [*der rein-en Ausdrucksfunktion als solcher*] cannot be certified [*beglaubigt*] by way of a single sphere of spiritual formation [*einzelne geistige Gestaltungs-Sphäre*], because as a truly universal and as it were world-encompassing [*weltumspannende*] function it precedes differentiation into the various fields of sense [*Sinngebiete*], it precedes the divergence of myth and theory, of logical reflection and aesthetic intuition. Its certainty and its “truth” are, in a manner of speaking, pre-mythical, pre-logical and pre-aesthetic; yet it forms the common ground from which all these formations have in some way sprung and to which they remain attached. And this of course is why this truth seems to slip through our fingers when we seek to fixate it – that is, confine [*festgelegt*] it in advance within a single field and delineate and determine it solely by means of the categories pertaining to this one field. (Cassirer 1957, 81; trans. mod.)

This passage marks the interest of the ‘pure function of expression as such.’ a sense that is not objectively determined and that constitutes all objectivities. We also wonder if this function, as well as the phenomenon of expression, interpreted as “originary phenomenon” (*Urphänomen*) (ibid., 73), would not be the transcendental field as such – not merely the first figure of the spirit. We will come back to this question at the end of our analysis. Now, we can observe that this function poses a fundamental problem of method: how can we grasp a function which precedes the objectivities that already exist and that are, thanks to it, determined? The first of Cassirer’s answers is clear: we cannot fix it or determine it through a ‘single sphere of spiritual formation.’ And yet, according to his ‘fundamental starting point’ that consists in refusing the separation between ‘positive-given being’ and ‘spiritual functions,’ Cassirer focuses his analysis precisely on a determined field, namely the mythical one. Indeed, a few pages later, he admits:

We have found that the meaning and basic trend of the pure expressive function could be apprehended *most clearly and surely* if we took the world of myth

as our point of departure. It is still wholly dominated by this sense [*Sinn*], which as it were permeates and animates it. (Ibid., 107; emphasis added)

It seems that the methodological requirement previously stated is no longer valid due to two aspects: the exigence of clarity and rigor – “the sharpness of the concept and the clarity of ‘discursive’ thought” (PSF 1, 113; ECW 11, 49) –, allied with the methodological position that leads to take the “objective configurations of spiritual culture” (*den objektiven Gestaltungen der geistigen Kultur*) as “guideline” (*Leitfaden*) (Cassirer 1957, 107; trans. mod.). Yet, in absence of any *epoché*, of any architectonic separation between the facticity of symbolic forms that are not only activities of the spirit, but also its historical sedimentations, this ‘guideline’ can very well risk to predetermine the transcendental function and to lead us to miss it. This situation seems to be a result of the identification of culture with symbolic forms, on the one hand, and of symbolic forms with spiritual activity, on the other. Yet, we have to examine precisely the way in which the spirit is brought to light through its process of objectivation, in order to see what the objective phenomenology of symbolic forms leads us to. Indeed, all symbolic forms do not manifest the spirit in the same way: the process of objectivation is progressive and overcomes some obstacles that prevent the reflection of the spirit, which is never an absolute one. But, in this case, what is it?

4 The Teleology of the Spirit and the Phenomenological Reduction

4.1 The Progressive Reflection of the Spirit

It is true that Cassirer takes into account a passive dimension.⁵ He repeatedly observes that consciousness can passively consider the works of the spirit as in a static and fixed reality. But the cause of this situation was never imputed to the symbolic

⁵ See especially the final chapter of the *Logic of Cultural Sciences* titled “The Tragedy of Culture,” where Cassirer discusses Simmel’s thesis about the ‘dialectic of culture.’ We will come back to this below.

form and to its process of objectivation, precisely because of the meaning of symbolic form and its definition as ‘energy of the spirit.’ In fact, the passivity is, according to Cassirer, a result of a lack of reflectivity, which could be noticed on two levels.

First, at the level of the separation of cultural fields. For Cassirer, a symbolic form tends to be fixed and experienced as an external reality, since it is isolated from other forms. A symbolic form owes its dynamism only to its inscription in the whole of culture, where each form is transformed and accomplished only in interaction with the others. The second factor that would be responsible for a passive relation to culture is the prevalence of an affective relation to the world that prevents the free reflectivity of the form (and therefore the autonomy of thought). This is, according to Cassirer, what deeply characterizes the mythical form constituted by the expressive function. Accordingly, myth – as much as science – is a symbolic form, i.e., an objective formation of a specific world; except that, with regard to myth, this objectivity is veiled due to an “originary affective base” (*ursprünglichen Gefühlsgrund*) (Cassirer 1955b, 95; trans. mod.), which conceals the objective symbolic mediation in favor of the immediacy of the singular presence of the object (e.g., the totem is not seen as a material representation of a god, but as its immediate presence: the moment of formation is not seen as such). However, a question arises: what is the status of this ‘originary affective base’? And in what way is it ‘originary’? Is it as originary as the activity of the spirit? The problem stems from the fact that, according to Cassirer (2006, 121), materiality is only a “limit-concept” (*Grenzbegriff*) that has no real existence in itself. It is not a principle opposed to the symbolic dimension: each form is both a form of activity and a form of perception or of passivity. But some forms are more active and more reflective than others, insofar as they make themselves relatively independent of the material dimension. As a consequence, we can state that even if a symbolic form is both spiritual and material, the materiality is considered, by Cassirer, as an obstacle, gradually overcome, to the free reflection of the form. Indeed, the process of objectivation, as a process of manifestation, is characterized by a dialectic between sense or ideality and sensibility or materiality: the activity of the spirit consists not only of a construction of an objective world, by following different directions of sense, it consists also of a process of “dematerialization” (*Entstofflichung*) or “detachment” (*Ablösung*) between the sign and the ideal meaning that it conveys (Cassirer 1957, 333). And this process coincides with the passage from an immediate and natural relation to the world to the knowledge of spiritual formation.

The final step is constituted by the function of signification (*Bedeutung*), mainly exerted by science and logical concepts, which reflect the "pure relational texture" (*reine Relationsgefüge*) (ibid., 328) of their own signs, independently of any sensible restriction. Of course, the logical concept still remains attached to a sensible sign, but not a particular and determined one: only the ideal meaning, the process of ideal construction prevails. Therefore, we can notice that a reflective power is attributed to a specific symbolic form. All symbolic forms are an 'energy of the spirit,' but only a few reflect this energy, 'expose' (*herausstellt*) the 'formative moments' (*gestaltenden Momente*),⁶ thanks to a historical and factual process, that is to say to the historical emergence of modern mathematics and physics. But the logical concept is not a speculative one: it is still attached to a determined symbolic formation. The manifestation of the spirit is never absolute. Cassirer assumes the Hegelian idea of a progressive development of the spirit in its own productions, but not the idea of an absolute spirit. This incomplete resumption leads to an important problem concerning the unity of the system of symbolic forms and the way in which this unity is brought to light.

4.2 The 'Tendency Towards the Idea' (*Zug zur Idee*) and the Status of 'Signification' (*Bedeutung*)

The symbolic is dynamic in a twofold sense: first as formation or configuration (*Gestaltung*) of an objective world, secondly as a factual-historical process of manifestation or exposition (*Heraustellung*) of the symbolic formation. As Cassirer states:

[...] the process in which life itself takes on form, life in the spiritual and not merely the biological sense, and that process in which life comes to conceive [*begreift*] and know [*weiß*] itself – these two must eventually constitute a unity [*muß schließlich eine Einheit bilden*]. (Ibid., 190)

⁶ "For the building of a 'world' – whether it is taken as an aggregate of sensuous or logical, of real or ideal objects is possible only in accordance with definite principles of articulation and formation. *And the concept does nothing other than to separate out these formative factors and fixate them for thought.*" (Cassirer 1957, 298f.; emphasis added)

We have to question the necessity of this crossover between unconscious formation and conscious exposition of this same formation: what is the nature of this necessity and what is it precisely and concretely that is exposed?

Cassirer considers the historical development of the spirit as a “definite systematic gradation” (*ein bestimmter systematischer Stufengang*), an “ideal progression” (*ein ideeller Fortschritt*),

[...] which we can assign as a goal [*Ziel*] for the spirit to no longer be satisfied with being and living in its own creations [*eigenen Bildungen*] and in its self-created symbols, but to grasp [*begreifen*] what they are. (Cassirer 1955b, 26; trans. mod.)

We can understand that history is considered as a *spiritual* development (*Entwicklung*), that is to say, as the development of a *teleology*: the factual evolution of symbolic forms is supposed to lead to more and more reflectivity. The sense formation (*Sinnbildung*) reflects itself in historical factuality, because there would be – immanent to the life of the spirit – a “tendency towards the idea” (*Zug zur Idee*), to its “self-presentation” (*Selbstdarstellung*) (Cassirer 1995, 42). But this is only possible under two conditions: first, it supposes an oversight of the sedimentation specific to the development of culture and, second, it supposes to attribute a reflective power⁷ to a particular and privileged symbolic function – signification (*Bedeutung*) – and to a historical form produced by this function – the formalized physical and mathematical sciences. Reading the *Crisis* allows us to take a critical distance to both these statements.

The reactivation of sense through cultural sedimentation, as Husserl noticed, is only a possibility of history, not a necessity. Otherwise, there would be no crisis. The crisis of the European sciences is precisely due to the fact that the logical and scientific forms do not coincide with a self-understanding of these forms. They

⁷ “It is with the logical concept that this mode of correlation first emerges. It first effects that reversal by which the I turns from the objects apprehended in vision, toward the manner of the seeing, the character of the vision itself. Only where this specific mode of reflection is practiced do we stand in the true realm of thought, and in its center and focus. *And this is the source of the rich significance that the concept assumes within the problem of symbolic formation.*” (Cassirer 1957, 288; emphasis added)

could form a unity, but it is not a necessity. The practical success, the creation of new formations, does not abolish 'the transmission by legacy' (*Vererbung*) and the permanent danger of merely passive associations that contributes to emptying the tradition of its own sense. Besides, the formalism of physical and mathematical science, the "formal-logical evidence" (*formallogische Evidenz*) (Husserl 1970, 366) does not guarantee the elucidation of sense formation, but rather threatens it. The process of formalization is interpreted as a "technization" (*Technisierung*) that leads to an "emptying of sense" (*Sinnentleerung*) (ibid., 49; trans. mod.): we obey certain rules, like in an autonomous and mechanical game, with its passive associations. Moreover, a "scientific life that is completely given over to logical activities" promotes "certain progressive conversions of sense [*Sinnverwandlungen*]" which, as Husserl explains,

[...] certainly work to the benefit of logical method, but they remove one further and further from the origins and make one insensitive to the problem of origin and thus to the authentic sense of being and truth [*eigentlichen Seins- und Wahrheitssinn*] of all these sciences (ibid., 367; trans. mod.).

The opposition to *PSF* cannot be more explicit. While Husserl kept reinforcing the problem of origins, of a transcendental life sealed into factuality and positivity, Cassirer carried out the reverse movement: "[i]nstead of taking the road back, [the inquiry] must attempt to continue forward [*nach vorwärts zu vollenden*]" (Cassirer 1955a, 113). There is no regressive inquiry (*Rückfrage*), because, according to Cassirer – who is in this respect very close to Hegel –, philosophy must take place in the middle of the activity of the spirit, in its factuality. In the *Logic of Cultural Sciences*, Cassirer states: "[*Im Anfang ist die Tat*:] always in the function of speech, in artistic creation, in the process of thought and inquiry, a specific activity [*eine eigene Aktivität*] expresses itself [*drückt sich aus*]" (Cassirer 1961, 109; trans. mod.). Goethe's expression,⁸ which Cassirer uses, is ambiguous: *Tat* may mean 'fact' (as, e.g., in *Tatbestand*, 'matter of fact') or 'action.' And we must hold on to both of these two meanings, because the spiritual activity is, according to Cassirer, a fact, whose legality must be found by following its concrete and historical development.

⁸ Which is precisely: "*Im Anfang war die Tat*" (*Faust*, Erster Teil, v. 1238).

In *Crisis*, Husserl uses this expression in a very different manner: “[*Im Anfang ist die Tat.*] It makes the still insecure stipulation [*Vorhabe*] more definite and at the same time clearer and clearer by means of samples of successful execution” (Husserl 1970, 156; trans. mod.). Husserl examines here the ‘inevitable naivety’ with which phenomenological research, as a radically novel one, must begin. The beginning is, at the same time, the beginning of the fact (or the factuality of the world) and of action, for phenomenology must start by practicing the *epoché* by reducing factuality progressively, in order to demonstrate the transcendental activity. However, this activity shows itself only thanks to the activity of the phenomenologist himself and never in a full and achieved intuition: the *epoché* does not consist in tearing the veil of sedimentation once and for all, and the transcendental field does not present itself as already constituted (ibid., 180), but rather as permanently elaborated or “constructed”⁹ by a “zigzag” (ibid., 58) movement between the given factuality of spiritual forms and originary sense formation. Thus, the historical development of culture does not suffice to exhibit the transcendental activity, but rather represents, due to the sedimentations, an obstacle for the enquiry that must be constantly reduced.

Yet, we have to examine a possible objection running through the whole *Crisis*, which is based on the principle of the “universal teleology of reason” (ibid., 378). Is there not a teleology, immanent to history and cultural development, that would necessarily lead to an exposition of transcendental sense formation? When Husserl asks:

[...] “the spiritual shape of Europe” – What is it? It consists in showing the philosophical idea, immanent in the history of Europe (spiritual Europe) [*die der Geschichte Europas (des geistigen Europas) immanente philosophische Idee aufzuweisen*], or, what is the same, the teleology that is immanent in it (ibid., 274; trans. mod.),

does he not develop the Hegelian idea of a spiritual history pursuing the *telos* of self-manifestation, of a humanity living “in the free formation of its existence [*in der freien Gestaltung ihres Daseins*]?” Ultimately, do Cassirer and Husserl not converge in the same rational optimism, despite the difference of their methods? We

⁹ Concerning the notion of ‘phenomenological construction,’ cf. Schnell (2007).

think that this methodological difference is decisive to understand both philosophical projects.

Indeed, the Husserlian teleology must be understood in connection with the practice of the transcendental *epoché* and reduction. In a few words, this teleology must be opened by the phenomenological practice without which the *telos* of the origins (the reactivation of the originary sense formation) would remain hidden. Contrary to Cassirer, who considers the historical development of symbolic forms as the deployment of an immanent *telos*, the *telos* of the spirit, expressed by each of these forms, Husserl does not presuppose that the cultural forms, such as geometry, express this originary and truly spiritual *telos*; they only pursue their own theoretical *telos*, and we have seen that the geometrical one does not lead to a reactivation of sense, on the contrary. Only phenomenology itself would be able to connect the theoretical and the originary *telos*,¹⁰ i.e., to solve the crisis of European sciences. It is the constantly renewed reduction to transcendental subjectivity, and even to transcendental intersubjectivity, beyond the world's factuality, that will eventually allow us to reduce the hiatus between sedimented objectivities and originary sense formation. Husserl's fundamental problem is not that of a teleology in history, but concerns the opening, thanks to phenomenology understood as a practical endeavor, of a teleology in which the cultural forms would reflect the *Sinnbildung*, the opening of a horizon of sense.¹¹ Certainly, there is a common rational optimism, but the Husserlian one concerns phenomenology as a historical moment that should be indefinitely opened by phenomenological work and that does not concern culture as such. This is contrary to Cassirer, for whom all cultural works are expressive. In the final chapter of the *Logic of Cultural Sciences*, he discusses Simmel's thesis concerning the 'tragedy of culture,' which is due to a 'dialectic,' a fundamental contradiction between the subjective and living creation, on the one hand, and the objectivation or crystallization of created works, on the other. Cassirer's answer is the following: subjectivity is not anterior to the objectivity of artefacts, it results from it, through an articulation of 'I' and 'You.' The work, as a symbolic reality, is an expressive medium:

¹⁰ With regard to the teleology of history in Husserl's thought, cf. Pradelle (2013, 275–321).

¹¹ On the phenomenological specificity of teleology, cf. Richir (1990, 356–360).

In the last analysis, work is nothing but a human act, which condensed itself into being [*die sich zum Sein verdichtet hat*], but which, in this condensation [*Verfestigung*], does not deny its origin. The creative will and power by which it comes into being continues alive and effective within it and in turn calls forth ever new creations. (Cassirer 1961, 217; trans. mod.)

Cassirer admits the process of sedimentation, but at the same time he seems to neutralize its effects. How it is possible to be ‘condensed into being’ and yet to keep the origin in a living form? We find here again the same ambiguity that we have noticed in the definition of symbolic form as ‘energy of the spirit.’ In this case, what would be the philosophical task of a ‘critique of culture’ if the transcendental activity is expressed by the objective works themselves, which cannot be brought out as such, independently of symbolic works?

4.3 Another Direction: The ‘Dynamic of Sense Formation’ (*Sinnbildung*) and Originary Phenomenality

According to the general project stated in the introduction of *PSF 1*, the task consists in going through all the cultural forms and demonstrating their specific differences and their inscriptions into the same functional activity. The goal is to determine

[...] a standpoint [*ein Standpunkt*] which would make it possible to encompass the whole of them in one view [*in einem Blick zu umfassen*], which would seek to penetrate nothing other than the purely immanent relations [*rein immanente Verhältnisse*] of all these forms to one another, and not their relation to any external, “transcendent” being or principle. (Cassirer 1955a, 82)

But this ‘fixed point’ is never reached, at least in the three published volumes, except in the form of a regulative idea. Cassirer has clearly seen this problem and tried, in his later works, to move into another direction. In a text entitled “‘Geist’ und ‘Leben,’” which should have been part of the unfinished fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer (1995, 207–229) considers the

methodological path he had previously taken: the critical analysis consisting in taking the highest product of spiritual development in order to show the principle of symbolic construction. This reflection was oriented towards the 'pure *telos* of theoretical knowledge.' But Cassirer admits that the philosophy of symbolic forms shall not be satisfied with this first orientation.

Its question does not just lead to the mere stock [*Bestand*] of forms, as a kind of static dimension [*statische Größe*]. It concerns much more this dynamic of sense donation [*Dynamik der Sinngebung*] in which and through which only the formation [*Bildung*] and the delimitation of spheres of being and of determined meaning is accomplished. What [the philosophy of symbolic forms] seeks to understand and to illuminate is the riddle of the becoming of form as such [*Form-Werdung als solcher*], not so much as an achieved determination, but as the process of determination as such [*Prozess der Bestimmung selbst*]. But this process does not take place in the direction of a pre-established path, which would start from a very precise starting point and arrive at an equally determined end. Thought does not move herein as in the bed of a river completed and prepared for it, on the contrary it must first seek its way – it must first, in some way, itself dig its bed. And this movement of a self-seeking thought is not immediately limited to one direction. (Ibid., 4f.; trans. mine)

As we have seen, the Hegelian sense of phenomenology, in absence of any absolute spirit or speculative concept, can only lead to determined objectivities, and not to 'the dynamic of sense donation as such.' That is the reason why Cassirer finally tried to search the unity of symbolic forms as a dynamic field that precedes the differentiation of symbolic objectivities. This field is first interpreted as "natural world-image" (*natürliche Weltbild*) (ibid., 5), in which we find the

[...] abundance [*Fülle*] of all the motives we have seen effectively, – but this abundance does not yet appear here divided and split [*noch nicht zerlegt und gespalten*]. It gives itself to us as it were like an almost unanimous and simple ray of light [*gleichsam ein heller und einfacher Lichtstrahl*], which has not yet refracted in the different mediums of sense [*Medien des Sinnes*]. (Ibid., 6)

In other texts, this dynamic and pre-objective field is interpreted as the articulation of three originary or basic phenomena (*Basisphänomene*, *Urphänomene*): the “I,” the “You,” and the “It” (the objectivity of works) (ibid., 113–195). It seems that, in his latter reflection, Cassirer has left his first Hegelian orientation towards a teleology of spirit behind and considered the possibility of a transcendental field, which would not be reduced to formal or material conditions, but would be correlated with a specific and originary phenomenality and with a specific thought, a ‘self-seeking thought,’ before any objective determination. We cannot develop here the details of the analyses proposed by Cassirer in his unpublished drafts. That is the reason why we will at this point limit ourselves to a few concluding remarks and indications for a future reflection.

5 Conclusion

The most essential difference between Cassirer and Husserl concerns, according to our analysis, the way in which sense formation (*Sinnbildung*) is revealed: it is either a self-manifestation in the cultural and historical field of symbolic forms (Cassirer), or an opening of a sense horizon that is only possible through the practice of the *epoché* (Husserl). We have been trying to show that the self-manifestation in and through the symbolic field could not depend on a teleology or, at least, that this teleology leads to important problems: the Hegelian way, which consists in pursuing the teleological process of objectivation up to the highest cultural forms, and which is supposed to reveal sense formation, is, in absence of any speculative logic, a dead-end. Yet, we have to admit that Husserl’s position is also problematic, because it depends on a theoretical, practical, and voluntary decision, without which the phenomenological field could not be opened. While Cassirer’s rational optimism seems to be based on the historical development of culture, Husserl’s equally optimistic position seems to depend on the phenomenologist himself and on his motivations.

This fundamental problem – how *Sinnbildung* reveals itself – is correlated with another one: what is *Sinnbildung* as such? We have already noticed that the first moment of the symbolic development of the spirit, i.e., expression (*Ausdruck*), could present itself as a transcendental field that articulates, before any objectivity,

a pure function and an originary phenomenon. We think that it would be particularly fruitful to concentrate the reflection on this originary phenomenality, where Cassirer is much closer to Husserl and to his regressive inquiry (*Rückfrage*) than to Hegel. The fruitfulness of Cassirer's analyses concerning a phenomenality that constitutes the objective world and that can be reduced to subjectivity seems to us to be relevant to recent insights within the phenomenological movement, mainly those of Marc Richir (1987, 11), who promotes a "radical *epoché*" that includes both objectivity and subjectivity in order to bring out an inchoative transcendental field as "phenomenon like nothing but phenomenon." However, if we stay within the framework of the philosophy of symbolic forms, two deeply linked questions still remain: first, how can we reach the dynamics of sense donation as such without any *epoché* of the factuality of the cultural world? How does originary phenomenality manifest itself so that it is accessible to philosophical reflection? We should examine whether the originary phenomenon requires a regressive inquiry that would be oriented towards the origins of sense, or if it reveals itself in experience, without any teleology. Secondly, should we not admit the ambiguity of symbolic forms, which can be an expression or an alienation of sense? The passivity towards the works of culture is not only a question of an affectivity that would prevail over pure signification: the highest scientific or even artistic activity can be based on passive associations and pure formal repetitions. This is neither the place nor the time to answer these questions, but the discussion that we have undertaken between Cassirer and Husserl – and which shall be pursued and completed – has at least shown that the meaning of 'symbolic' is at the crossroad of two questions: the interpretation of culture and the interpretation of the phenomenological method of *epoché*.

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Edmund Husserl and Ernst Cassirer rank among the most important philosophers of the 20th century. Despite the differences between their philosophical outlooks, their investigations show a common enduring interest in the exploration of human culture. This volume provides the first extensive analysis and comparison of Husserl's and Cassirer's approaches to the philosophy of culture, assembling contributions by leading international scholars and young researchers.

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