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*Arno Schubbach*

# THE GENESIS OF THE SYMBOLIC

ON THE BEGINNINGS OF ERNST CASSIRER'S  
PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

NEW STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND  
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

Arno Schubbach  
**The Genesis of the Symbolic**

# **New Studies in the History and Historiography of Philosophy**



Edited by  
Gerald Hartung and Sebastian Luft

## **Volume 7**

Arno Schubbach

# The Genesis of the Symbolic

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On the Beginnings of Ernst Cassirer's  
Philosophy of Culture

Translated by D.J. Hobbs

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# List of Abbreviations

## Works by Ernst Cassirer

### **ECW: Ernst Cassirer, *Gesammelte Werke***

*ECW 1: Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen.*

*ECW 2: Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit, Vol. 1.*

*ECW 3: Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit, Vol. 2.*

*ECW 4: Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit, Vol. 3.*

*ECW 5: Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit, Vol. 4.*

*ECW 6: Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff.*

*ECW 7: Freiheit und Form.*

*ECW 8: Kants Leben und Lehre.*

*ECW 9: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1902–1921.*

*ECW 10: Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie. Erkenntnistheoretische Betrachtung.*

*ECW 11: Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil. Die Sprache.*

*ECW 12: Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Zweiter Teil. Das mythische Denken.*

*ECW 13: Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Dritter Teil. Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis.*

*ECW 14: Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance.*

*ECW 16: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1922–1926.*

*ECW 17: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1927–1931.*

*ECW 18: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1932–1935.*

*ECW 21: Axel Hägerström. Eine Studie zur schwedischen Philosophie der Gegenwart.*

*ECW 22: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1936–1940.*

*ECW 23: An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture.*

*ECW 24: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften 1941–1946.*

### **ECN: Ernst Cassirer, Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte**

*ECN 1: Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen.*

*ECN 2: Ziele und Wege der Wirklichkeitserkenntnis.*

*ECN 4: Symbolische Prägnanz, Ausdrucksphänomen und "Wiener Kreis."*

*ECN 5: Kulturphilosophie. Vorlesungen und Vorträge 1929–1941.*

*ECN 6: Vorlesungen und Studien zur philosophischen Anthropologie.*

*ECN 8: Vorlesungen und Vorträge zu philosophischen Problem der Wissenschaften 1907–1945.*

*ECN 9: Zu Philosophie und Politik.*

*ECN 10: Kleinere Schriften zu Goethe und zur Geistesgeschichte.*

*ECN 11: Goethe-Vorlesungen (1940–1941).*



## Texts from Ernst Cassirer's Literary Estate

*Disposition 1917*: “‘Philosophie des Symbolischen’ (allg. Disposition).”

*Sheets 1–241*: “Material und Vorarbeiten zur ‘Philosophie des Symbolischen.’”

*Manuscript 1919*: Untitled manuscript from 1919.

## Works by Immanuel Kant

As is customary, references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given to the first and second editions of the work as A and B, followed by page number. References to the other listed works by Kant are to the *Akademie* edition by volume and page number, which are also included in the consulted translations.

*AHE*: *Anthropology, History, and Education*.

*CPR*: *Critique of Pure Reason*.

*CPJ*: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

*FI*: “First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.”

*LL*: *Lectures on Logic*.

*LN*: *Logik Nachlaß. Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 16.

*MF*: *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.

*PFM*: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*.

# Introduction

The object of the philosophy of culture is an unusual one. Compared with the themes of other philosophical subdisciplines, culture has to count as a quite recent phenomenon, but it is nevertheless just as fundamental as it is wide-ranging. To begin with culture means much more than giving the traditional questions of theoretical and practical philosophy a new foundation. At the same time, the philosophy of culture also has to admit that it is itself included in its “object”: philosophy is one part of what we call culture. Reflection on the philosophy of culture thus takes place within the field of phenomena to which it is dedicated. It participates in the “object” on which it reflects, and it influences the historical development of that object, a fact which can hardly leave philosophy’s understanding of itself untouched.

The task that thus arises is that of apprehending the philosophy of culture systematically as a cultural phenomenon and understanding its emergence historically as a reaction to social developments.<sup>1</sup> Following sporadic earlier references, the philosophical concept of culture famously first became established terminologically in the 18th century, and already at that time it was intertwined with the incipient progress of modernization.<sup>2</sup> As such, it is by no means surprising that there are a wide variety of reactions and attitudes towards the concept of culture: on the one hand, Rousseau saw in culture the threat of the human being becoming alienated from his natural needs; on the other hand, Kant emphasized the possibilities for the moral cultivation of the human being.<sup>3</sup> The concept of

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**1** On the connection between the emergence of the philosophy of culture and cultural self-reflection, cf. also Konersmann (2003, pp. 15f. and 99–105), as well as Konersmann (1996b, pp. 348–353).

**2** Historically and systematically, the concept of culture lies in particular on the horizon of the comparison of a wide variety of regional or social cultures; on this point, cf. Busche (2000, pp. 78–85). Against the backdrop of cultural comparison, Niklas Luhmann also examines the concept of culture in the context of social self-observation since the 18th century; cf. Luhmann (1999, pp. 31–54, in particular pp. 35–42 and 48–54).

**3** On this illustrative constellation of Rousseau and Kant, cf. Recki (2010, pp. 174–178, and for more detail 2008, pp. 269–285). On the tradition of cultural critique that has accompanied the philosophy of culture since its beginnings, cf. Bollenbeck (2007, with particular reference to Rousseau in pp. 22–76), as well as Konersmann (2008, in particular pp. 14–17). On Kant’s understanding of culture, cf. Bartuschat (1984). These references provide only a brief overview of a history of the concept of “culture,” but it is also true that a history of this sort does not play a significant role in what follows; for further details, cf. once again Busche (2000), as well as Perpeet (1976), whose claims, admittedly, seem quite problematic, both in view of the alleged “scientific impact” of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture and beyond (Perpeet 1976, p. 53).

culture experienced an upswing (which still persists today) around 1900, when philosophy frequently began to claim to have at its fingertips philosophical answers to the renewed surge towards modernization and the associated crisis-experiences. In reaction to an increasingly complex and confusing world, however, philosophy usually followed a Rousseauian impulse, not uncommonly invoking the notion of a totality or of life, which modernity seemed to be putting into jeopardy.<sup>4</sup> From the point of view of the present, such approaches often seem to be too simplistic, and occasionally even dangerous, given that they contributed to the erosion of the political and intellectual culture of the Weimar Republic. Viewed in particularly philosophical terms, however, they are able neither to identify the object of the philosophy of culture conclusively nor even to take up the decisive challenge at all. Rather, they skip over this challenge when they simply set the unity of culture in opposition to its multiplicity or pit internal cultivation against the hustle and bustle of civilization, when they point to the diversity of the scientific disciplines themselves as symptoms of the crisis and only appear to justify their own discourse via the effusive rhetoric of the cultural critic.

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture stands against such a pessimistic critique of culture, which was characteristic of the *zeitgeist* at the beginning of the 20th century. Rather, following Kant's confidence in human cultivation, Cassirer's philosophy is concerned with the fundamentally emancipatory power of culture. When Cassirer – as the present study will prove in more detail – sketches out the plans for his new project of a philosophy of culture in June 1917, he is outlining, in the midst of the first world war, a philosophy of culture that focuses on the opportunities for the human being's cultural emancipation, one that refers to scientific knowledge as its paradigm in spite of all of the technical machinery of war. Occupied by day in the task of censoring the daily papers from foreign countries at the War Press Office until they suited the purposes of German propaganda,<sup>5</sup> Cassirer answered the hardships of the time with a quite untimely optimism, instead of working them up to a fever pitch like many others. This undertaking could almost give the impression that Cassirer was applying himself to the task of proving a claim formulated a month later, in July 1917, by Hermann Bahr in the *New Review* [*Die neue Rundschau*]. Namely, Bahr insists that it is simply not the case that the Germans “lack the phenomenon of the all-encompassing man,” but rather that Ernst Cassirer specifically is called to this task. The rea-

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<sup>4</sup> On the philosophy of culture and the philosophy of life from 1900 until the Weimar Republic, cf. Bollenbeck (2007, pp. 199–232); for a treatment that takes Cassirer into account, cf. Konersmann (2003, pp. 66–81, and 1996a).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Toni Cassirer (2003, p. 129), as well as Moynahan (2013, pp. 36f.).

son for this claim was that Cassirer's works, according to Bahr, rang out not only as the "chorus of the new truth," but also as that of "German freedom."<sup>6</sup>

In the event that Cassirer took notice of these lines, he might have read them with surprise, finding Bahr's effusive rhetoric to miss its mark. Bahr's text is nevertheless informative, because he understands the untimely optimism of Cassirer's philosophy in the context of the first world war as the decisive partisanship of an engaged intellectual and not as an expression of the aloof Olympian Cassirer who quickly became a familiar cliché after the second world war.<sup>7</sup> Cassirer's political engagement is not proved solely by the fact that he – unlike his teacher – already belonged at the beginning of the first world war among the few clairvoyants who could resist the national euphoria and who saw the coming catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> No more is it limited to the fact that Cassirer later belonged among the few intellectuals who sought to defend the Weimar Republic against its enemies. Cassirer's political thought is systematically inscribed into his philosophy of culture from its beginnings, because he outlines it during the first world war and orients it decisively on the emancipatory potential of culture.<sup>9</sup>

Admittedly, the beginnings of Cassirer's philosophy of culture should not be contextualized solely by reference to the crisis-experience of the first world war. Rather, the present study will focus on the fact that Cassirer's project of a philosophy of culture is simultaneously a reaction to a further crisis, one that is characteristic of the situation of philosophy in the 20th century: since, following the natural sciences, the human sciences and the cultural sciences had increasingly emancipated themselves from philosophy throughout the 19th century, philoso-

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6 Bahr (1917, pp. 1485 and 1488). For the reference to this text, I am indebted to Moynahan (2013, pp. xvii-xxii). With the second formulation, Bahr is referring to Cassirer's study in the history of ideas from 1916, *Freedom and Form [Freiheit und Form]*, which was often seen as a reaction to the first world war and pointed to as an expression of Cassirer's political thought; cf., e.g., Lipton (1978, pp. 42–69), and most recently Moynahan (2013, pp. 159–192). Ernst Wolfgang Orth speaks of "a sort of cultural-political application of his [Cassirer's, A.S.] philosophical, rational ideals" (Orth 2004, p. 13).

7 Since Lipton (1978), additional texts have been dedicated to Cassirer as a political thinker, a fact which is all the more important since Lipton's interpretations of Cassirer's philosophy are not always reliable; alongside Moynahan (2013), cf. also Vogel (1997). The texts collected in *ECN 9* are also informative in this context

8 Cf. Lipton (1978, pp. 36–38); in addition, on the role of philosophy in the nationalistic turmoil of the first world war, cf. Flasch (2000, with a particular focus on Cohen and Natorp on pp. 308–328). Unfortunately, Flasch does not address Cassirer's detachment from this phenomenon.

9 Most notably, Birgit Recki has discussed this point with respect to the concept of freedom; cf. Recki (2013, pp. 73–93). Moynahan (2013, pp. 3–43 and 121–156) further explains in an enlightening manner that Cassirer's theory of science too can, like that of his teacher Hermann Cohen, be viewed in the context of political and social discussions.

phy was becoming less and less able to assert itself, as in Hegel, as competent to produce a comprehensive system of knowledge or to retain even one domain of objective knowledge in its own right. Even the Neo-Kantian project of participating in epistemological or scientific-theoretical reflection on the success of the empirical sciences ran into its limits, because the disciplines of the natural and cultural sciences did not perceive themselves to be in need of philosophical assistance either in making their objects accessible or for methodological self-reflection. As a result, according to the judgment of Herbert Schnädelbach, German philosophy was caught in a persistent “post-Idealist identity-crisis” (1984, p. 5).<sup>10</sup> It remains difficult to argue with this assessment today.

Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of culture should be understood as an answer to the challenge of this “post-Idealist identity-crisis” in philosophy. It is characterized by the fact that it draws out radical consequences from the post-Hegelian situation and advocates for engagement with the empirical cultural sciences.<sup>11</sup> For Cassirer, whose first monograph was devoted to Leibniz,<sup>12</sup> it was evident that culture, even in its unity, had to be characterized first and foremost by its diversity. He thus develops his project of a philosophy of culture from a pluralistic perspective in order to be as faithful as possible to a differentiated world that is quite complex in its own right. Such a multifaceted world, however, is not accessible without further efforts, especially because an independent description of culture via philosophy constantly threatens to take up one particular cultural perspective and to be unable to reflect on its limitations at all. To guarantee sufficient access to a world that is quite differentiated in its own right, Cassirer thus turns to the cultural sciences and incorporates into his philosophical considerations their extensive empirical knowledge, as well as the viewpoints of the various disciplines. He thus guides his reflection on the philosophy of culture through the empirical facts of culture and relies on the discriminating knowledge

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**10** With a view to the understanding of science that shifted towards research in light of the impact of the success of the empirical disciplines, see also Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 95–97).

**11** Insights into the convoluted field of the cultural sciences around 1900 can be found in Bruch, Graf, and Gangolf (Eds., 1989). In what follows, I will neither make an attempt at an overview of the cultural sciences of the time nor at a definition of these approaches. If so desired, the cultural sciences can be understood (following Max Weber) to include all the disciplines “that view the events of human life from the viewpoint of their *cultural significance*” (Weber 2004, p. 371). However, in what follows I understand by the term “cultural sciences” essentially the whole patchwork of disciplines with which Cassirer was occupied during his work on his philosophy of the symbolic, chiefly linguistics, the history of religion, and the history of art.

**12** That is, *Leibniz’s System in its Scientific Foundations* [*Leibniz’ System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*] from 1902 (ECW 1).

of the cultural sciences in order to do justice to the diversity of culture.<sup>13</sup> His reference to the cultural sciences thus deviates from the Neo-Kantian tradition, and in particular from the approach of Heinrich Rickert, because he is not primarily developing an epistemology or a philosophy of science, which could only account for a narrow interest in the cultural sciences.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Cassirer is aiming for a productive collaboration with the cultural sciences in order to make the diversity of culture accessible to reflection on the philosophy of culture and to do justice to the unity of culture via a pluralistic conception. Cassirer's emphatic emphasis on the unity *and* multiplicity of culture corresponds to the differentiation of the disciplines of the cultural sciences and the diversity of the cultural phenomena with which they deal.

Cassirer's project of a philosophy of culture is thus in keeping with Ralf Konersmann's characterization of the philosophy of culture as an attempt at a "world-bearing thought [*welthaltiges Denken*]" (Konersmann 2003, p. 108).<sup>15</sup> The reason is that this project continually develops his philosophical reflection in close proximity to the cultural sciences and that it firmly denies the illusion that philosophy only has to do with concepts and is thus able to avoid getting entangled in an all-too-complex reality. Philosophy frequently took such a refuge in pure concepts when faced with the ramifications of the rapid development of mathematics in the 20th century, and it sought to justify this refuge by a theory of concepts oriented on formal logic. In so doing, however, it undercuts the Hegelian insight that was often characteristic of the philosophy of culture in the 20th century: philosophy cannot withdraw to what is apparently purely conceptual, because concepts are essentially determined in their unfolding throughout history and their manifestation in culture. They attain their meaning in contexts that they carry with them and on which they therefore permit us to reflect.

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**13** I am thus taking the liberty of reversing, as it were, Birgit Recki's question in the title of Recki (2007): What could cultural science learn from Ernst Cassirer? In my view, the most prominent question in the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture is that of its significance, i.e., of why and what Cassirer really hoped to learn from the cultural sciences of his day.

**14** Cf. Rickert (1962). Cassirer will only deal with the cultural sciences from the perspective of epistemology or the philosophy of science much later; cf. first and foremost *ECW* 24, pp. 355–486, as well as *ECN* 5, pp. 201–250. However, there is basically no developed theory available for the human and cultural sciences, as noted by Recki (2011b, p. 40). We are nevertheless not dealing with a turn "From Epistemology to the Philosophy of Culture" as suggested by the title of Orth 2004. The reason is that Cassirer will go on to produce additional works on the epistemology of the human sciences and the natural sciences.

**15** Konersmann himself developed this approach further primarily with the concept of the "cultural fact"; cf. the wide-ranging discussion of the historical and systematic scope of this concept in Konersmann (2006, pp. 13–69, with a particular look at Cassirer in pp. 56–59).

Thought and concepts are always already “world-bearing,” conditioned by language and languages, saturated by phenomena and experiences, permeated by history and traditions, made plausible by examples and metaphors. The “world-bearing thought” of the philosophy of culture should thus not be understood in such a way that it must first be turned towards the world. It is aware of its entanglement with the world and it attempts in various ways to reflect on that entanglement theoretically.

Nevertheless, according to the thesis of the present study, the particular topicality of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture consists in the attempt to develop such a “world-bearing thought” via engagement with the cultural sciences. In the following pages, I will therefore discuss Cassirer’s philosophy of culture primarily with an eye to its engagement with the cultural sciences and will reason through its theoretical justification, practical implementation, and productive consequences. My aim is not at all, as attempted by many other works, to deal with the whole of Cassirer’s philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Rather, I will focus on the emergence of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture in the transition from his early epistemological writings to his works on the philosophy of culture. The question of why and how Cassirer made the transition from a history of the “problem of knowledge” and a theory of the scientific concept to a philosophy of culture and of the symbol has been much discussed in recent years, and it has been given a wide variety of answers. The present study, however, is supported in its treatment of the genesis of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture by a new discovery from Cassirer’s literary estate. As I have already hinted, and as I will explain further in the first chapter, it is possible to reconstruct a series of interconnections among unpublished and hitherto unknown drafts, notes, and outlines that pertain to a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” and originate from the years 1917–1919.<sup>17</sup> Cassirer sketches out his project of a philosophy of the symbolic for the first time in summer 1917 in a 32-page *Disposition*, subsequently producing a collection of more than 240 consecutively numbered sheets pertaining both to the conceptual development of

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**16** The format of the general sketch seems to be as dominant as ever in the secondary literature on Cassirer. For two more recent works that are worth reading, cf. Skidelsky (2008) and Kreis (2009). While Skidelsky goes through Cassirer’s life’s work, as it were, biographically, Kreis discusses it purely systematically in the “form of a single, continuous line of reasoning” (Kreis, p. 31).

**17** This discovery goes back to a period of residence at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library during the years 1999 and 2000 that was devoted to producing a detailed page census of the entire literary estate for the publication of *ECN*. It was published for the first time in Schubach (2008). This article represents an – admittedly outdated – point of departure for the present study.

the project and to the task of working through the studies that he was reading from the cultural sciences. Finally, in summer 1919, there emerges the manuscript of a chapter concerning language that was apparently based on these preparatory works and which is at least partially incorporated into the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* from 1923.

This material reveals unique insights into the genesis of a project that relies on the epistemo-critical writings just as much as it broadens their philosophical foundations and subjects them to revision with a view towards a comprehensive philosophy of the symbolic. It was these records that gave rise to the question of the philosophical grounds for Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences of his day and for the intertwining of his reflections with their extensive research. It is not merely that these notes and outlines, which occasionally served the purposes of Cassirer's own self-understanding, reveal, in their more unguarded formulations, many of the general tendencies and motivations of Cassirer's philosophy of culture in a more striking manner than do the published writings, which are more detailed and deliberate. Most particularly, they also give evidence of the close intertwining of the conceptual development of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" with Cassirer's reading of the linguistic sciences, the history of religion, or the history of art. In these records, Cassirer is by no means unconcerned with the task of establishing connections between philosophical thought and studies in the cultural sciences, and in that task, time and time again, he runs into problems, which sometimes turn out to be philosophically productive, but which at other times lead to an impasse.

The first chapter will be limited mainly to the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 and will consult other writings by Cassirer for the purposes of clarification. As a first step, I will describe the discovery from the archive, and subsequently I will explain the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" step by step. My task will be to demonstrate how Cassirer, as it were, uses his theory of the scientific concept from his major epistemo-critical work from 1910, *Substance and Function*, as a model for the symbolic accomplishments of language, myth, and aesthetics, and how he attains his conception of the symbolic from a generalization of that concept. The occasion for this decisive step was probably not least his study in the history of ideas from 1916, *Freedom and Form*. That is, Cassirer, as a result of his occupation with the development of aesthetics in the 18th century, had apparently formulated a plan to broaden his philosophy beyond the limits of the question of knowledge, which necessarily had to involve a revision of its systematic foundations and which motivated the transition from a conception focusing on the concept to one focusing on the symbolic.



Admittedly, it is striking just how little Cassirer strives for a more precise determination of the concept of the symbolic in the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” a point which certainly also holds true for the published writings. This dearth of terminological clarification concerning the central concept of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture has often been criticized, but it nevertheless has philosophical grounds that have hitherto scarcely been considered and never explained in detail: Cassirer’s concept of the symbolic is – according to the thesis of the present study – incapable of being clarified in a purely conceptual manner, but is rather determined by the specification of various symbolic forms, and thus in terms of its unfolding towards language, myth, and aesthetics with the help of the insights of the cultural sciences. The “operative meaning” of Cassirer’s terminology, already emphasized forcefully by Ernst Wolfgang Orth in 1988,<sup>18</sup> has here a completely determinate point: the philosophical generalization of the concept of the symbolic is oriented from the start on exploration of the material of the cultural sciences, which provides information concerning the respecifications of the symbolic into various forms of symbolization. What the symbolic is must be determined on the basis of the diversity of language and languages, myth and myths, art and the arts, concerning which philosophy is to be instructed by the cultural sciences. The concept of the symbolic is thus from the beginning just as tightly bound up with the knowledge of the cultural sciences as it is with philosophical reflection. The clarification of this concept is both a question of conceptual specification and a matter of material explication with the help of a variety of forms of symbolization.

The second chapter will situate the resulting central conceptual challenge of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of culture, that of defining the relationship of the symbolic in general to the specific forms of symbolization, in the larger historical context of transcendental philosophy, as well as simultaneously clarifying this challenge systematically. In the years prior to 1917, Cassirer renews his intensive occupation with Kant, whose philosophy had been a significant influence on him since his studies in the Neo-Kantian environment of the University of Marburg. In so doing, he concerns himself in greater detail with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which had hardly played any role in his epistemo-critical writings up through 1910, but which, in contrast, occupies a central position in the general sketch of *Kant’s Life and Thought* from 1918. As the second chapter will show, Kant’s third *Critique* is also of central significance for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” Thus, it does not merely – read as Kant’s aesthetics – represent a contribution to our understanding of one of the forms of symbolization in

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Orth (1988, in particular pp. 45–48).

which Cassirer had begun to be interested. First and foremost, it has to do with the conception of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” itself, since Cassirer, in his task of defining the relationship of the symbolic in general to the various forms of symbolization in particular, relies on observations made by Kant. We can expect this renewed reading of Kant’s third *Critique* to be groundbreaking for Cassirer’s philosophy of culture and its close relationship to the cultural sciences of its day.

The reason is that Cassirer’s conception of the symbolic in general and its specification into particular forms of symbolization is bound up with a definition of the relationship between universal and particular conditions that Kant had approached with an eye to the various forms of cognition. After identifying the conditions of knowledge as such in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, having oriented himself in that context on the paradigm of Newtonian physics, he is immediately faced with the question of how to account for the conditions of biological knowledge, which apparently already go beyond all physical mechanics with the introduction of the concept of life or of the organism. Accordingly, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes between particular and universal conditions of cognition in light of various specific forms of cognition. This distinction does not only entail that the universal that determines the objects of cognition must not be given from the outset and *a priori* in the form of particular conditions, laws, and concepts, but rather may perhaps be sought in the actual process of cognition, for which reason Kant introduces the reflective judgment alongside the determining judgment. Furthermore, as a result, Kant also introduces certain particular conditions of specific forms of cognition that cannot be deduced philosophically, but which must nevertheless be presupposed in order, for example, to qualify the objects of biological knowledge as such. These conditions must necessarily be presumed in order to characterize the objects of specific forms of cognition as such, but they are not prescribed to these objects *a priori*. Rather, they are associated with their empirical application, and they are specified empirically and constantly determined in the actual process of cognition. Thus, transcendental reflection now also incorporates a sort of condition that cannot be detached from the progress of empirical cognition, and which is thus able to characterize specific forms of cognition in terms of their particularity. Transcendental conditions of cognition are no longer solely or primarily universal and *a priori*; they can just as well be specific to particular forms of cognition and interwoven with the empirical process of cognition. This transformation of the transcendental is most clearly expressed in Kant’s “First Introduction” to

the third *Critique*, which was first published in the form in which it is known today in 1914 in Cassirer's edition of Kant's writings.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that Cassirer's *Disposition* for a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 takes a similar path in conceiving of the relationship of the symbolic in general to the specific forms of symbolization in particular. "The" symbolic, as I have already pointed out in brief, is closely connected in the *Disposition* to the question of the relationship of the most universal conditions of culture to the concrete conditions of language, myth, knowledge, or art. Cassirer finds an answer to this question that is rooted in the transformation of the transcendental that is sketched out by Kant. According to Cassirer, the most universal conditions of the symbolic are specified into concrete fields of symbolization, on the one hand, in the sense that they adopt various concrete forms. On the other hand, however, they undergo this concrete determination by means of a process that is of an empirical and historical character. As such, the concept of the symbolic cannot be clarified in a purely terminological manner, and the forms of symbolization in language, myth, knowledge, and art cannot be derived from the most universal conditions. They must be investigated with the help of concrete symbolizations and can only be the object of philosophical reflection by beginning with empirical investigations.

Cassirer's "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is thus bound up with a notion that had occupied Kant more than a hundred years previously in a completely different context, but which had largely had no effect on German Idealism. Accordingly, his reflection in the philosophy of culture on the most universal *and* the specific conditions of culture, as well as on the unity of the symbolic *and* the multiplicity of symbolic forms, is also distinguished systematically from the idealist systems, and in particular from the aspiration, bound up with the name of Hegel, of being able to start with the concept of the concept and to account for its historical development within a system that operates deductively. Instead, in good Kantian tradition, Cassirer adopts a decidedly reflective standpoint and, taking into account the cultural sciences, begins with the facts of culture in order to interrogate them as to their conditions within their historical becoming and their inherent specification. Cassirer may be the last philosopher to attempt to comprehend culture as a whole in this way, and in particular to have the ability to aspire with at least some plausibility to a synthesis of the natural and the human sciences.<sup>20</sup> Such a perspective on Cassirer, often mentioned in nostalgic

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<sup>19</sup> See bibliography for information on the original German edition of this text, as well as for the English translation. -Trans.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Lofts (2000, pp. 25–27).

tones, should in no way obscure the fact that Cassirer's reflection on the philosophy of culture aims from the outset at the diversity that is inherent in culture, just as his theory of the sciences constantly demonstrates a sensitivity to the specific differences among the disciplines within the human and the natural sciences.

The second chapter thus focuses on the philosophical justification for why Cassirer's philosophy of culture engages with the cultural sciences. How this engagement occurs and what challenges it entails will be investigated by way of example in the third chapter with the help of two authors to whom the records and initial outlines for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 to 1919 pay close attention: the ethnic psychology of Wilhelm Wundt and the linguistic research of Wilhelm von Humboldt have a marked significance for the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Cassirer consults Humboldt and Wundt both to get a view of the empirical specification of the diversity of languages as well as to refine his own philosophical understanding of language. He reads Humboldt, therefore, just as much as an empirical linguistic researcher as a philosopher of language, and he consults Wundt's two-part volume on language from *Ethnic Psychology* simultaneously in order to attain an overview of recent discussions in linguistics and to engage with Wundt's psychological-naturalistic understanding of the development of language. An entanglement thus occurs between the philosophical formation of concepts and theories, on the one hand, and the research of the cultural sciences and their peculiar methodological discussions, on the other.

I will primarily discuss Cassirer's engagement with Wundt and Humboldt by following the guideline of the concept of the genesis of language. The reason is that Cassirer both incorporates into this concept elements of his critical engagement with Wundt's naturalistic understanding of language and uses it to carry forward idealist themes from Humboldt's philosophy of language and linguistic history. The concept of the genesis is thus all the more interesting since it reveals the general thrust of Cassirer's own philosophy of language and culture. That is, Cassirer extends the genesis of language from the simplest indicative gestures in which he, following Wundt, holds that it has its origin to the emancipation from the senses that is realized in self-conscious symbolization. This emancipation has its model in Cassirer's own theory of the scientific concept, and it is now, in accordance with Humboldt's model of inflected language, supposed to have its historical linguistic foundations in the spoken word. Supported by Cassirer's records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," which can be reconstructed as approximately 240 consecutively numbered sheets, as well as a first outline on language from 1919, I will address his discussion of the theory of gestures in Wundt and the theory of sound in Humboldt, and thereby attempt to demonstrate how

the discussion of the philosophy of culture and language is bound up with the concrete empirical and methodological questions of linguistic research. These connections are not easy to disentangle, but it should be possible to unfold them by way of example with a look at the difficulties and the productivity of Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences of his day.

Consequently, with the help of the question of the genesis of the symbolic, the last chapter will take a look at Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences at the beginning of his new project of a philosophy of culture. At the same time, it will thereby contribute to a better understanding of the concept of the genesis, a concept which has to count as a central term of Cassirer's philosophy of language and culture, but which has hitherto been given scant attention in the research, despite a reference by Ernst Wolfgang Orth.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the question of the genesis also plays a methodological role for the present study. That is, we will not be dealing in the following chapters with an ostensibly completed text or even with the apparently definitive form of Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Rather, we will be taking a look at his working process as it is documented in drafts, records, and outlines. To examine the genesis of Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic means to pursue the questions of why Cassirer opens himself up towards new questions in the field of the philosophy of culture and of how, to that end, he upends the foundations of his texts on the philosophy of science (Chapter 1); how he appropriates one of Kant's notions in order to conceptualize the relationship of the symbolic to its specific forms and to emphasize, with a view to the universal and specific conditions of symbolization, the simultaneously transcendental and empirical unity and multiplicity of culture (Chapter 2); and how he ultimately develops his philosophical project via engagement with the empirical cultural sciences of his day and thereby connects his theoretical terminology to empirical observations (Chapter 3).

The following investigations will therefore deal with both Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences and his references to the philosophical tradition, and even to his own texts, strictly in the context of his working process. Consequently, I do not claim to explain the conception of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" by tracing it back to Cassirer's epistemo-critical writings, to the influence of Kant, or to his reading of Humboldt or Wundt. Instead, all these references should be understood as elements of a productive process, as waypoints on a philosophical path that went back to the foundations of his own thought, that referred to the thinkers of tradition and engaged with the research of the cultural sciences, because it sought to turn towards the cultural world and was simulta-

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21 Cf. Orth (1988, pp. 57–59).

neously aware of its own historicity. Engagement with the cultural sciences and the history of philosophy should always be understood as a means and medium for Cassirer's thought.<sup>22</sup> The productive unfolding of his own thought thus required the freedoms that were continually opened up by Cassirer's reading.

This heuristic premise should be taken into account just as much for Cassirer's treatment of his own texts and the philosophical tradition as for his engagement with the cultural sciences. In light of the discussion of Cassirer in the philosophical literature, however, I want to emphasize its implications first and foremost with respect to the second chapter. When I work through the significance of Kant for the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in that chapter, I do not mean to claim that Cassirer's philosophy of culture should basically be understood within the familiar Kantian or Neo-Kantian tradition. Rather, my point is to demonstrate how a renewed occupation with Kant can become, for Cassirer's thought, which was influenced by Neo-Kantianism, a moment of innovation that leads him beyond the limits of his previous philosophy. A new focus in his reading of Kant, his increased involvement with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and the greater attention paid to the "First Introduction," which he himself had newly published, allow Cassirer to come across arguments that he incorporates into the conceptualization of his philosophy of culture in order to tackle the philosophical challenges that he sees before him. Accordingly, Kant does not serve as any fixed, Neo-Kantian framework for Cassirer's thought in the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Nor should he be identified with any determinate, doctrinal Neo-Kantian conception of his philosophy. Rather, Kant represents an invaluable resource of thought.<sup>23</sup> What allows Kant to become so productive in the genesis of Cassirer's project of a philosophy of culture, however, would be overlooked by a history in the traditional format, which would begin with Kant's *Critiques*, pass through the discussions of Kant in the 19th century, and finally lead into Cassirer's philosophy of culture. The second chapter, therefore, does not recount such a history, instead aiming to ex-

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<sup>22</sup> Krois (1987, pp. 1f.), makes an early reference to the central significance of the connection between the history of philosophy and systematic philosophizing for Cassirer's thought. On the connection between systematic and historical philosophizing in the Neo-Kantian tradition, cf. Ferrari (2003, pp. 1–30) and Knoppe (1992, pp. 49–61).

<sup>23</sup> This rereading of Kant, which was productive for the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture, is not interpreted correctly by the readings of those who, like Schwemmer (1997, especially pp. 9f.), would like to view the modernity of Cassirer's philosophy of culture solely in the context of an alleged turn away from Kant and from Neo-Kantianism. In contrast, on the functional role of Kant in Neo-Kantianism as well as for Cassirer's own position, cf. the sophisticated analysis by Ferrari (2010, particularly pp. 293–295 and 306f.).

plicate how Cassirer returns to the Kantian tradition once again and appropriates it anew in the context of his project of a philosophy of culture.

What is true of Kant's role in the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture is just as applicable to many of Cassirer's other systematic references and appeals to the history of philosophy. On methodological grounds, therefore, I will not enter into the wide-ranging discussion concerning which thinkers are supposed to have had an influence, or even the decisive influence, on Cassirer's philosophy of culture. This includes not merely the emphasis on the great significance of Goethe.<sup>24</sup> Numerous other philosophers, scientists, and literary figures have been invoked just as often.<sup>25</sup> Thanks to Cassirer's extraordinarily broad body of knowledge and his own idiosyncratic intertwining of systematic and historical philosophizing, many of these proposals can be given strong justifications. However, it should constantly be borne in mind in this context, as in the case of Kant, that Cassirer seldom allowed a notion or a concept to enter into his own philosophy without understanding it in light of his own presuppositions and subsuming it to his own purposes.<sup>26</sup> For his new project of a "Philosophy of the Symbolic," he will make use of many such references in order to set his philosophical approaches in motion and to carry them forward, perhaps in an altered form. The genesis of the new project, however, should just as little be ascribed to one single decisive influence as to an allegedly fixed Neo-Kantianism. Striving for simple attributions here is a vain endeavor. Every attempt to verify Cassirer's references and to validate his interpretations of philosophers, literary figures, or scientists (which would be of great interest particularly in Hegel) overlooks Cassirer's productive working process. Accordingly, the present study will rely on the texts consulted by Cassirer only to the extent that it seems necessary to do so in order to work out their role in Cassirer's working process.

The present study will thus focus on this working process, and in that task it relies primarily on Cassirer's working notes on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

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**24** Cf. the aforementioned Krois (1987, pp. 176–182, and 1995, in particular pp. 303–308), as well as the articles in Naumann and Recki (Eds., 2002).

**25** I will list just a few classic works by way of example. With respect to Cassirer's Neo-Kantianism, cf. Renz (2002, in particular pp. 70–87); on the role of Leibniz, cf. Ferrari (2003, pp. 163–182); with regard to Hegel, cf. Verene (1969) and Möckel (2004); furthermore, on Baumgarten, cf. Gross (2001); and on Duhem, cf. Ferrari (1995, in particular p. 184); for lists of further influences ranging from Hertz and Humboldt to Goethe and Vischer, cf., e. g., Graeser (1994, pp. 34–37) and Seidengart (1995, in particular pp. 202–204).

**26** Renz (2002, p. 73) also notes that every identification of an influence proves to be problematic for the additional reason that, in Cassirer, acquisitive reading and philosophical reflection usually flow into one another seamlessly.

In this respect, it is oriented on a number of works from the field of science studies that could demonstrate the fruitfulness, even in the case of the human sciences, of taking into consideration the operations and the methodology, the process and the tools, of scientific praxis.<sup>27</sup> These works opened up a productive perspective on the records for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” which aided Cassirer both in conceiving of the project and in reading a wide range of material in the cultural sciences concerning language, myth, science, or art. Cassirer’s working notes were not least the material, logistical means for a process of philosophical thought that takes the findings of the cultural sciences into account, orders them systematically, and makes them available to itself.

Thus, the working notes allow us to demonstrate that, by all appearances, Cassirer’s philosophy of culture has its beginnings in a first *Disposition* dated June 13, 1917. Nonetheless, they by no means reveal the one decisive insight that might establish the form of the work to be published later, and which could, as it were, permit us to decrypt its central theme.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the working notes on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” simultaneously express, alongside the necessity, uncertainty, and productivity of the working process, the indeterminacy, instability, and openness of its beginning. In actuality, Cassirer needed time to pursue the goals that he envisioned from the beginning and to make sure of them despite detours and wrong turns, as well as through necessary revisions and adaptations. The existing drafts, notes, and outlines from the years 1917 to 1919 document merely the beginnings of a longstanding working process, which leads initially to Berlin for an extensive collection of records and a first outline for a chapter on language.<sup>29</sup> In Hamburg, where Cassirer serves as a professor at

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**27** For several innovative and authoritative works on note-taking in the sciences, cf. Holmes, Renn, and Rheinberger (Eds., 2003), which includes in particular Hoffmann (2003). Cf. also Rheinberger (2003 and 2010, pp. 244–252). Also, in recent years, writers have increasingly considered the working practices of the human and cultural sciences; cf. Hoffmann (2008 and 2010) and Trüper (2007).

**28** Thus, Henrich (2011, p. 81), with an eye to the great works of the philosophical canon, claims that they “arise from a single design concept for their formation.” Henrich’s emphasis on the role of the “inner genesis of the insight” (cf. Henrich 2011, pp. 105 ff.), however, is justified less by investigation of concrete working processes than by a philosophy of subjectivity, which draws him closer to the German Idealism that he investigated so congenially.

**29** The differentiation of the retrospective dimension of the origin and the prospective dimension of the beginning, which Emil Angehrn connects to the metaphysical tradition of *Ursprungsdenken*, seems to me in this respect to be instructive, allowing me to characterize my premises as an interpreter by noting that, with a view to the genesis of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture – as well as Cassirer’s own conception of the genesis of the symbolic – I am dealing with its beginnings and not with its origins; cf. Angehrn (2007, pp. 251–253).



the newly founded university from fall 1919, he also intensifies his engagement with the cultural sciences thanks to the Warburg Institute, with which he became well-acquainted some years later. It is hard to believe that the project did not undergo any alterations during this time. In particular, the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which first appeared in 1929, actually points to expansions of the project that lie far beyond the horizon of the *Disposition* from 1917 and the limits of the present study. This volume exhibits a surprising independence from the two previous volumes, but nevertheless it does not mark an end to the project. Namely, because of the substantial scope of the third volume, Cassirer had given up his hopes for a concluding part, although his preparatory work had already undergone a great deal of progress. These texts were finally published in 1995 as the so-called “fourth volume” from the literary estate.<sup>30</sup> The genesis of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture is therefore no more set in stone in the first records from summer 1917 than it comes to a conclusion in the existing volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* or in the posthumously published “fourth volume.” Instead of taking on a definitive form, Cassirer’s reflection on the philosophy of culture ventures again and again beyond the actually published writings.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, the fact that we have the ability to deal with the genesis of a philosophical project with the help of its first outlines and notes should not induce us to hope that we already have in hand the key to the whole. Similarly, the handwritten records should not tempt us to fall into the seductive fantasy that we are able, as it were, to look over the philosopher’s shoulder, perhaps as he sits at his writing desk on June 13, 1917, virtually looking through the pages to discover what his new philosophical project is setting into motion. Not everything that plays a role in scientific working processes can be set down on paper itself or ascertained therefrom, even if many studies on paperwork in the sciences ignore this point.<sup>32</sup> However, we may not disregard the fact that the significance of records like those made by Cassirer is often quite a bit more open-ended than is suggested by the physical collection of such material, and that this significance unfolds in diverse contexts that go far beyond the philosopher’s writing desk.

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**30** Cf. the corresponding texts and “editorial annotations” in *ECN* 1.

**31** By reference to the article “Form and Technology” [“Form und Technik”] – cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 139–183 – which appeared a year after the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, we can discuss the extent to which that article implies alterations and shifts in Cassirer’s approach to the philosophy of culture. Exciting insights in this context are offered in Hoel and Folkvord (2012).

**32** For one such critical perspective, cf. Garforth (2012).

What takes place within these pages from Cassirer's outlines and notes from 1917 to 1919 can therefore be situated in various contexts, and in each case it unfolds in a different sense, as already indicated. As a start, we could mention the political situation of the year 1917. In the middle of the fracturing of civilization that occurred during the first world war, the philosopher puts to paper the *Disposition* for his new project. It thus seems hard to imagine that this outline, as well as Cassirer's optimism with respect to the philosophy of culture, should not be understood as a reaction to the situation of the time.<sup>33</sup> The way in which this reaction is articulated philosophically only becomes intelligible by taking into account the context of Cassirer's work as an individual and the transition from his epistemo-critical works to a new project of the philosophy of culture. The outline for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 should thus be related in particular to Cassirer's occupation with the history of philosophy, which at that time is leading to impressive results with his study on the development of aesthetics in *Freedom and Form* and his general sketch of *Kant's Life and Thought*. The genesis of the project, therefore, can be located just as much in the context of the political situation as in connection with Cassirer's work as an individual. Furthermore, as the second chapter will demonstrate, that genesis is connected to the history of transcendental philosophy, because Cassirer, in his renewed reading of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, adopts one of Kant's notions that is of central importance for our understanding of transcendental reflection, but which appeared to have been long forgotten. Initially, it is a systematic consequence of this notion that Cassirer's philosophy of culture is essentially rooted in the cultural sciences of his day. Naturally, however, we also see here simultaneously a reaction to the formation of the disciplines of the cultural sciences and to the new situation of philosophy within a university setting, a point which touches on a broader context for the beginnings of Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Consequently, the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" highlights one productive moment in Cassirer's thought, a moment which can be situated and which unfolds in various contexts.

This study thus focuses on the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture, without thereby assuming a privileged context in which this philosophical project attains its genuine meaning. Rather, for methodological reasons, Cassirer's drafts, notes, and outlines should be contextualized in various ways, by means of which they unfold in various respects a precise, irreducible signifi-

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<sup>33</sup> How great a hold the outbreak of the first world war had on Cassirer personally is related by Lenz (1948). Krois (2005, pp. 315 f., note 83) calls attention to this text, which is where I discovered this bibliographical information.

cance in each case, make accessible further levels of philosophizing beyond that of argumentation, and open up their own temporal horizons beyond individual thought and even the history of philosophy. The *Disposition* for a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” should thus be understood in the context of the history of Cassirer’s work and of contemporary philosophy, and it strives for a philosophy of culture in the wake of Cassirer’s theory of the scientific concept (Chapter 1). However, at the same time, the *Disposition* stands in the larger historical context of transcendental philosophy, and in this context it is bound up with one of Kant’s notions that will only demonstrate its productivity in Cassirer’s philosophy of culture (Chapter 2). This notion grounds systematically the integration of specific and historical conditions into transcendental reflection and the close connection of Cassirer’s observations on the philosophy of culture to the empirical and historical knowledge of the cultural sciences (Chapter 3). Therefore, Cassirer’s philosophical project should not be viewed merely in the institutional context of the differentiation of the disciplines in general, with Cassirer voting for the interdisciplinary collaboration of the philosophy of culture. Beyond that, it is worthwhile to investigate his concrete engagement with the cultural sciences, a task for which Cassirer’s records are utterly essential, and to consider how reflection on the philosophy of culture interweaves its concepts and arguments with empirical materials and discoveries, concerning which it is content to be instructed by the disciplines of the cultural sciences. The following chapters will thus investigate the contiguity of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture with the cultural sciences of his day on various levels, in terms of its philosophical development within Cassirer’s work, its systematic justification and significance in the framework of approaches drawn from transcendental philosophy, as well as its practical implementation in the elaborate paperwork of the philosopher and its productive consequences for a philosophy of culture.

The volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which Cassirer published beginning in 1923, ultimately cover a broad swath of material in the history of culture, and they integrate it with a reflection on the philosophy of culture that nowhere pretends to any specious conceptual purity. It is astonishing that this state of affairs has rarely attracted attention, at least from philosophical readers: considering just how numerous are the accounts of Cassirer’s philosophy of language and how often the conception of symbolic forms has been debated and their relationships to one another discussed, the question of the systematic reasons for Cassirer’s extensive study in the cultural sciences and the philosophical relevance of the enormously broad material that he covers has rarely been raised. Nonetheless, the observation that Cassirer’s reflection begins, for example, with the diversity of languages in order to formulate his philosophy of language requires that we accept the fact that this philosophy can hardly be

apprehended without reference to his engagement with numerous studies on a wide variety of languages. That fact notwithstanding, Cassirer's reading of the cultural sciences has seldom been appreciated, and it has scarcely been more than mentioned in passing even into the present day.<sup>34</sup> One exception is the almost legendary collaboration with Aby Warburg.<sup>35</sup> However, the understandable fascination with the circle surrounding his Warburg Institute has, for one thing, contributed to this connection to Hamburg being seen as evidence for the modernity of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and for abstracting it from Cassirer's Neo-Kantian background, which had been used for far too long in the world of German post-war philosophy to discredit Cassirer's philosophy altogether. In addition, however, this connection largely pushed the early beginning and the systematic independence of Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences of his day into the background.

Cassirer's understanding of the act of philosophizing is essentially rooted in engagement with the specificity of concrete phenomena and in the incorporation of the insights of a variety of disciplines in pursuit of this end.<sup>36</sup> Without renouncing the independence of philosophy and its perspective, Cassirer thus engages intensively with the sciences, so that he is not merely talking about "the world," but rather doing justice to a world that is complex and differentiated in its own right. Cassirer's mode of access to other disciplines is thus defined by the fact that he makes use of them for describing the world and simultaneously subjects them to an independent philosophical reflection. This understanding of philosophy has retained its relevance into the present day. Its point is to apprehend the act of philosophizing itself as one activity within a complex world and a university that is differentiated into various disciplines. For that reason, the genesis of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" in particular has to be understood as a multifaceted working process, which uses the resources found in paperwork just as much as the insights of the sciences in order to turn philosoph-

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**34** In his eminently readable account, Ernst Wolfgang Orth points to the constitutive collaboration of Cassirer's philosophy of culture with the cultural sciences with striking brevity; cf. Orth (2004, pp. 191–224, here p. 219). This close relationship, however, has been widely neglected by the research. For one of the few exceptions known to me on the subject, e. g., of Cassirer's reading of Ludwig Noiré, cf. Freudenthal (2004, pp. 213–218).

**35** By way of example, cf. the introduction to Hamlin and Krois (Eds., 2004, pp. xi–xxviii, here pp. xii–xvi).

**36** This essentially "interdisciplinary" component of Cassirer's philosophy has rarely been noticed; for an exception, cf. Plümacher (2011). She establishes a connection to the present-day understanding of interdisciplinarity, but in so doing refers less to the close connection between Cassirer's philosophy of culture and the cultural sciences than to the proximity of his theory of science to the natural sciences and their methodological discussions.

ical reflection towards the world in its diversity. Even today, this seems to be a promising plan for a philosophy that does not deny its interdisciplinary situation, but which rather accepts the scientific opportunities and the simultaneous challenges of this situation.

The present study itself has a long and storied genesis behind it. The discovery from the archive on which it focuses is a byproduct of a nine-month residence at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library from 1999 to 2000, which was dedicated to the task of preparing a page census for Cassirer's entire literary estate for the publication of *ECN*, with which I was involved as a student assistant. Without the initiative and the support of the editors, Oswald Schwemmer, Klaus Christian Köhnke, and above all John Michael Krois, this acquisition would never have been possible. I would like to thank Yale University Press for financing my stay. I am much obliged to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library for the wonderful working conditions and for being awarded the "Frederick A. and Marion S. Pottle Fellowship," which allowed me to consult Cassirer's estate once again in January 2010 and ultimately to come to the decision to write a study on the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. In addition, my thanks go to Michael Friedman, who enabled me to make a three-month writing visit to Stanford University in 2011 and who took the time to discuss excerpts from my work.

Having said that, this project would probably never have been possible without intellectual stimulation by the research in the history of science on laboratory journals in the natural sciences and on the paperwork produced by those working in the human and cultural sciences. My thanks go in particular to Michael Hagner and his coworkers at ETH Zürich, in whose discussions I have had the pleasure of participating since 2005. The impetus for this project was ultimately provided by conversations with Christoph Hoffmann of the University of Lucerne, who thankfully opened my eyes to the world of working notes. The fact that the present study has developed in a more philosophical manner than he might have preferred is due to my own *déformation professionnelle*.

Nonetheless, I would not actually have been able to write the present study without the necessary time. For this time, I would like to thank *eikones*, the National Center of Competence in Research "Iconic Criticism" at the University of Basel, where I not only enjoyed years of stimulating discussions on the question of the image, but also, thanks to the leadership of Gottfried Boehm and Ralph Ubl, the freedom to compose a monograph on Cassirer's philosophy of culture that was not compiled from articles. I am no less thankful to all the staff at *eikones*, and in particular at the *eikones* graduate school, for countless suggestions arising from collaborative work and discussion. Furthermore, I would like to thank the Philosophical Seminar at the University of Basel, where I was able

to teach and put so many ideas up for discussion with students and staff. Without the support of Emil Angehrn in particular, it would likely not have been possible for me to achieve a *Habilitation* at the University of Basel with this study. I want to thank Gottfried Boehm, Michael Hampe, and Gerald Hartung, who agreed to serve as evaluators during the process of my *Habilitation*. For enabling me to work and live in the stimulating and generous academic environment at ETH Zurich after my *Habilitation*, I again want to thank Michael Hampe.

This study would not have been written without the friendship of many Cassirer researchers and their commitment to a lively and open-minded exchange. This community is so inclusive and hospitable that I cannot possibly list all the relevant names here. The original study was published in the series *Cassirer-Forschungen* by Felix Meiner Verlag in Hamburg, to which I owe my thanks. The present translation was made possible by the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, which granted the book the special award from the program “Humanities International” in April 2018 and thereby funded this translation.

It is a great thing that the German Publishers and Booksellers Association is promoting translations of German books from the humanities in this way. But it is another thing entirely to find someone to take over the demanding work of translating. With the help of Sebastian Luft, I was lucky to find D.J. Hobbs. As far as I can tell, he has done such a wonderful job that my book may be a better read in translation than in the original. He deserves my gratitude for all the hours he spent devotedly bent over the text. Finally, I owe my thanks to Eliane Schmid, Christoph Schirmer and de Gruyter for their cooperation in producing this book, as well as to Gerald Hartung and Sebastian Luft for including this book in their series *New Studies in the History and Historiography of Philosophy*.



# The Beginnings of a Work

## Cassirer's Disposition for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917

The beginnings of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* are bound up with fantastic legends – indeed, with legends that are all too fantastic. Dimitry Gawronsky, in his relevant biographical sketch from the year 1949, tells of a flash of insight on a streetcar: "Cassirer once told how in 1917, just as he entered a street car to ride home, the conception of the symbolic forms flashed upon him; a few minutes later, when he reached his home, the whole plan of his new voluminous work was ready in his mind, in essentially the form in which it was carried out in the course of the subsequent ten years" (p. 25). Strictly speaking, this anecdote does not merely make reference to the flash of insight, but rather concentrates the whole work of the conception of a multi-volume work into a few minutes ride on a streetcar, during which Cassirer would have had neither the time nor the opportunity to record his thoughts. The essential work is supposed to have taken place solely in his mind; everything after that is supposed to have been merely the implementation of a plan that had already been fixed intellectually.

In the memoirs of Toni Cassirer, which she began to write after the death of her husband in 1945 and concluded by 1948, the development of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is also bound up with the streetcar. Unlike Gawronsky, however, Toni Cassirer does not refer to an immediate flash of insight, but rather to continuous work on the streetcar. That is, she maintains that her husband was pressing ahead intently with the conception and the preparatory work on his daily commute to the War Press Office. He "stood there [at the front end of the car, A.S.], confined to a minimal space, with one hand holding onto a support and the other hand holding a book from which he was reading. The noise, the crowd, terrible illumination, bad air quality – all of this was no obstacle. In this way, the plan for the three volumes of the 'Symbolic Forms' was formulated" (T. Cassirer 2003, p. 120).

In light of the enormous amount of material that went into Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, this description of his incessant and voracious reading may very well have a certain plausibility. However, it is hardly believable that Cassirer drafted or even mapped out a plan for the three volumes of the work from 1923, 1925, and 1929 solely in his mind during his journeys by streetcar in summer 1917. The epiphany in a streetcar may have managed to occur without being recorded. A plan for the forthcoming volumes, in contrast, could hardly have taken shape without notes, sketches, and so on. The descriptions by Toni

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Cassirer and Gawronsky represent obviously idealized versions of the philosopher's concrete working process. Nevertheless, they are significant clues that the work on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* was already beginning in the year 1917.

Cassirer research has given little credence to these reports concerning the early beginnings of Cassirer's philosophy of culture – as is the assessment of Massimo Ferrari – and it had good reasons for doing so.<sup>1</sup> The anecdotal character of these reports and their temporal distance of more than 30 years from the events in question makes them appear less than trustworthy. Furthermore, they can hardly be verified. In particular, the two reports do not in any way give hints as to where we might find traces of Cassirer's labor on his main work in the philosophy of culture that could substantiate this early beginning. And nevertheless, it is surprising that Cassirer research has not sought after the existence of outlines and preparatory work on a *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. After all, in Cassirer's estate, there are 46 library folders of records that emerged from his labor on this work, which were catalogued during their collection in the archive under the summary title of "research notes."<sup>2</sup> Cassirer by no means wrote only books; from the beginning, he worked on paper, a trait which seems to be quite necessary even in spite of all the legends concerning Cassirer's phenomenal memory, because his texts draw upon an impressive abundance of authors, virtually from the whole history of philosophy and from many of the natural and human sciences.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the references to a beginning of the work on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in the year 1917 have not been verified by recourse to the literary estate can, however, have yet another reason: an alternative, presumably more at-

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**1** Cf. Ferrari (2003, p. 163). By way of example, cf. Graeser (1994, p. 11), who is rather critical, but nevertheless appreciative, of that "chronological reference" to the year 1917. In contrast, cf. the rather affirmative references to Gawronsky by Paetzold (1995, pp. 45 and 84), as well as Krois (1988, p. 17). Orth references the anecdote with some reservation, but nevertheless uses it to support his thesis that the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* "evidently arises between 1911 and 1918/20" (Orth 2004, p. 80).

**2** The literary estate is stored by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University in New Haven, CT, under the archival number GEN MSS 98 and is divided into 54 boxes and 1,083 folders. In the process of assembling the estate, the research notes on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* were categorized in accordance with the individual volumes. They are located in Box 23, Folder 424 – Box 24, Folder 447 (Volume 1); Box 26, Folder 491 – Box 26, Folder 501 (Volume 2); and Box 28, Folder 538 – Box 29, Folder 548 (Volume 3). On the history of the literary estate, cf. Giroud (2004).

**3** For several anecdotes concerning Cassirer's phenomenal memory, cf. Schubbach (2008, pp. 103–108).

tractive context for its development was preferred. Even a writer as early as Gawronsky recounts how Cassirer, after his appointment to the University of Hamburg, became acquainted with the library of Aby Warburg at the latest by 1920 and saw his own thoughts given expression in its systematic organization: "Many times Cassirer expressed his positive amazement at the fact that the selection of materials and the whole inward structure of this library suggested the idea that its founder must have more or less anticipated his theory of symbolic forms" (Gawronsky 1949, p. 26). Cassirer's proximity to Warburg's library was similarly emphasized by Fritz Saxl, and subsequently highlighted again and again in the secondary literature as well.<sup>4</sup> The attractiveness of this connection can be accounted for quite easily. The rediscovery of Cassirer since the 1980s has been accompanied, not merely by an emphasis on his significance in the history of philosophy, but also an emphasis on his relevance in the modern day.<sup>5</sup> The connection to the Warburg Institute suits this area of interest very well, as it seems to make Cassirer a virtual contemporary of the modern-day reader and the present state of the cultural sciences. In contrast, Cassirer's Neo-Kantian heritage comes across as a liability.<sup>6</sup> The Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism has long seemed to be of interest exclusively in the context of the history of philosophy, and it was already becoming increasingly discredited in the Weimar Republic as traditional and obsolete, as pointed out emblematically at the Davos debate between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger.<sup>7</sup> This well-meaning attempt to highlight Cassirer's relevance to the modern day by emphasizing his connection to the Warburg Institute, however, thereby threatens to preserve an opposition to the Weimar Republic on the part of the human sciences that would first require reflection – and Cassirer was certainly no advocate for such an opposition.<sup>8</sup>

Cassirer's own claims, but also testimonies drawn from his surroundings in Hamburg, give little reason to set his collaboration with the Warburg Institute in opposition to his Neo-Kantian background. Rather, we find indications that the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* had its own, earlier points of origin, which finally

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Saxl (1949) and Jesinghausen-Lauster (1985, pp. 148 f.).

<sup>5</sup> On the reception of Cassirer up through the 1980s, cf. Krois (1987, pp. 6 ff.), as well as Krois' introduction to Cassirer (1985, pp. XI – XXXII, here pp. XXVII – XXXI).

<sup>6</sup> By way of example, cf. Woldt (2012) and Schwemmer (1997, pp. 221 f.).

<sup>7</sup> On the Davos dispute in a historical context, cf. Gründer (1988), the essays in Kaegi and Rudolph (Eds., 2002), as well as Friedman (2000) and Gordon (2010).

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, with respect to the well-known mutual personal regard between Cassirer and Warburg, this constellation has even been an obstacle to a sophisticated analysis of the positions and patterns of thought adopted by the two scholars, which are by no means entirely harmonious. For a first attempt at such a task, cf. Schubach (2016).

came to fruition in Hamburg. As early as Saxl, it has been pointed out that Cassirer's intellectual development was not merely completely independent in general.<sup>9</sup> Even the conception of his primary work on the philosophy of culture was, according to Saxl, already nascent by the time Cassirer became acquainted with Aby Warburg's library: "At the time of Cassirer's first visit, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* was just taking shape in Cassirer's mind" (Saxl 1949, p. 49). Moreover, there are at least vague references to labor on the prospective work that was by no means purely mental. Gawronsky, with respect to a reunion shortly after the first world war that would certainly have stuck in his memory, reports that Cassirer was at this time "absorbed" in his new work.<sup>10</sup> It is scarcely imaginable that this absorption was unaccompanied by the production of notes, sketches, and outlines.

Cassirer himself provides information concerning the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in various places. In the preface to the second volume from 1925, he recollects: "The first outlines and other preliminary work for this volume were already far advanced when, through my call to Hamburg, I came into closer contact with the Warburg Library" (*ECW* 12, p. XV).<sup>11</sup> And in the introduction to the published version of the lecture he held at the library, "The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences" ["Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften"] from 1923, he tells of the "personal impression" that he "experienced at the first close acquaintance with the Warburg Library," and he further notes: "I have long been preoccupied with the questions that I would like to address in merest outline in this lecture before you: but now they seem to be standing before me, as it were, incarnate" (*ECW* 16, p. 75). This information too suggests that the beginnings of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* go back prior to Cassirer's move to Hamburg in fall 1919, and thus to his time in Berlin.

In fact, Cassirer had begun to conceptualize the new project of a philosophy of the symbolic in Berlin during the first world war, and had apparently already produced an extensive collection of drafts, notes, and outlines in an obviously intensive period of work. In Cassirer's estate, as I will demonstrate in the follow-

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<sup>9</sup> "The character of Cassirer's scholarship, however, was such that, though enriched and extended, its intrinsic direction was never changed by his co-operation with Warburg" (Saxl 1949, p. 50).

<sup>10</sup> "When the author of this article again met Cassirer, shortly after the termination of World War I, Cassirer was already quite absorbed in his new work" (Gawronsky 1949, p. 25). Toni Cassirer also recounts such a reunion "a few days after the end of the war" (T. Cassirer 2003, p. 121).

<sup>11</sup> The translations of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* employed in this text are drawn from a manuscript prepared by S. G. Lofts. -Trans.

ing pages, we can reconstruct a *Disposition* for a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from June 13, 1917, as well as an almost completely preserved collection of 241 consecutively numbered sheets that document a first phase of Cassirer's working process. These sheets, which are marked by Cassirer's own hand with the title "Material and Preliminary Work for the 'Philosophy of the Symbolic,'" came into being between summer 1917 and summer 1918. In turn, they lay the foundation for the outline of a chapter concerning language that Cassirer will write in summer 1919 and which will later be included in part in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* from 1923.

Consequently, the anecdotal reports by Toni Cassirer and Gawronsky on the beginnings of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* can be used to confirm the fact that Cassirer had actually begun work on this new project in summer 1917. Beyond that, however, Cassirer's records provide insight into a laborious working process that is not attested in the anecdotal reports. The tentative sketches and outlines prove that Cassirer also needed notes and sheets of paper in order to outline the fundamental systematic framework of his project of a philosophy of the symbolic. The numerous records on the literature of the cultural sciences, furthermore, demonstrate just how great a challenge is presented by the task of looking through this extensive material, ordering it, and interpreting it philosophically.

This situation apparently leads to a choice among the various contexts for the development of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, to the disadvantage of the circle in Hamburg surrounding the Warburg Institute. However, this impression is misleading, because only the rhetoric of the sudden inspiration and original conception of the work suggests that there would be only one moment and location for its development. A work like the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, however, has many repeated beginnings and develops just as much in moments of sudden inspiration as in extended phases of becoming familiar with, processing, and structuring the materials or exploring, unfolding, and refining the argumentation, and finally in the synthesis of the whole in the process of writing. Without a library like that of Warburg, it would scarcely have been possible to look through such an extensive set of material in the cultural sciences as Cassirer incorporated into his work; without prior systematic presuppositions and his own conception of a project dealing with the philosophy of the symbolic, however, it would just as little have been possible for a work requiring such a stringent process and such a content-rich development to come about.<sup>12</sup> While the present

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<sup>12</sup> For a balanced assessment of the relationship between Cassirer's own approaches and the stimulus of the Warburg Institute, cf., by way of example, Ferrari (2003, pp. 207–247). According

study deals with the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* solely in the context of its beginnings in Berlin, with the further progression of the project in Hamburg, in contrast, left out on pragmatic grounds, it by no means intends to detract from the significance of the Warburg Institute for the development of the work, a point which is all the more applicable since Cassirer constantly emphasized his convergence with the library's systematic mode of inquiry.

In this first chapter, I will start off by describing the discovery from the archive and providing grounds for the dates of the *Disposition*, the notes, and the outlines. Subsequently, I will go over the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" in detail and discuss the transition from Cassirer's epistemology and theory of science to his philosophy of the symbolic and of culture in the 1920s. I will thereby demonstrate how Cassirer generalizes his theory of the scientific concept into a concept of the symbolic that is supposed to encompass various forms of symbolization. In this context, he is not primarily striving for a refined theoretical definition of the concept of the symbolic. Rather, Cassirer uses this concept to bring the material of the cultural sciences concerning language, myth, and art, but also his own works on scientific knowledge, into one common systematic perspective. This perspective focuses simultaneously on the specific differences of the concrete forms of symbolization and on their further internal classification into languages, myths and religions, arts, and disciplines. The universality of the concept of the symbolic should thus from the very beginning be related to its specification for various forms of symbolization.

Furthermore, the systematic challenge of understanding the symbolic in its universality and simultaneously comprehending it in its specific forms serves as a justification for why Cassirer's philosophy of culture refers both intensively and extensively to the cultural sciences of his day. That is, on Cassirer's view, the specification of the symbolic is not purely a philosophical concern, but rather always a question of empirical discoveries as well. Only the "wealth of material or empirical scientific research," therefore, is supposed to grant philosophy access to a diverse world of the symbolic that is quite complex in its own right (*ECW* 11, p. X). This systematic approach should be understood as Cassirer's pro-

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to Ferrari, Cassirer strove for "a sort of integration of his own theoretical point of departure and the research activities characteristic of his surroundings in Hamburg" (Ferrari 2003, p. 230). Habermas too begins with a coincidence of the approaches when he claims that "the interest that both Cassirer and Warburg took in the symbolic medium of spiritual forms of expression [grounded, A.S.] their congeniality"; cf. Habermas (1997, p. 80). The library would have offered Cassirer, Habermas continues, vast "historical material" as well as the opportunity for "deepening a conception that went back to Cassirer's genuine insights into the philosophy of language" (Habermas 1997, pp. 83 and 89).

ductive answer to the challenge to philosophy that results from the development of human and cultural sciences that are differentiated from one another, as a concluding discussion of Wilhelm Dilthey's descriptions of the post-Hegelian situation of philosophy will demonstrate.

## The Discovery

The “Disposition” for a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” is located today in a section of Ernst Cassirer's literary estate that collects the so-called research notes for the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>13</sup> The first page of an unbound booklet composed of a series of larger sheets that have been folded into one another bears the title “Philosophy of the Symbolic (General Disposition)” and has been dated “13.VI.17” by Cassirer's own hand (see Fig. 1). Cassirer carefully numbered the eight extant pages with a blue colored pencil. In addition, several sheets have been inserted that, according to their sporadic dating, were produced at approximately the same time, but I will not focus on these sheets in what follows because their material and formal relevance seems uncertain.<sup>14</sup> The designation “Disposition” on the first page was underlined in red, as was the addition of “Sheet I” a line below.

It is not difficult to identify the continuation of this *Disposition* in further records located in the same and the subsequent library folder in the estate. One sheet, for its part, is titled “General Disposition” and – once again underlined with a red colored pencil – described as “Sheet II a).”<sup>15</sup> It is obviously connected

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**13** More precisely, the *Disposition* is located in GEN MSS 98, Box 24, Folder 440 at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. For more precise information, cf. the introductory remarks to the transcription in the appendix of this volume.

**14** In the aforementioned folded booklet, two further notes, written crossways, must be mentioned for the time being: the first sheet bears in its title the date “16.VI.17” and the heading: “On the Concept of the ‘Intentional’ – the Mental as Intentional,” and it takes a stand against the schema of “inner” and “outer” as the foundation for interpreting intentionality. The second sheet bears in its title only the date “30.VI.17” and discusses the relation between “symbolics” and “semiotics,” between “representation” in experience and description by means of external signs. An additional, similarly labeled sheet on the “deictic function” carries these notions further via a diagram. Inserted alongside these discussions, moreover, is a note on the “metaphysics of the symbolic” that refers to the sheets that I will discuss momentarily, but which does not belong among them. Because these notes do not, at least formally, stand in an altogether unambiguous relationship to the *Disposition* and the sheets that I will reconstruct hereafter, I will not rely on them in what follows.

**15** This sheet is located in GEN MSS 98, Box 24, Folder 441.

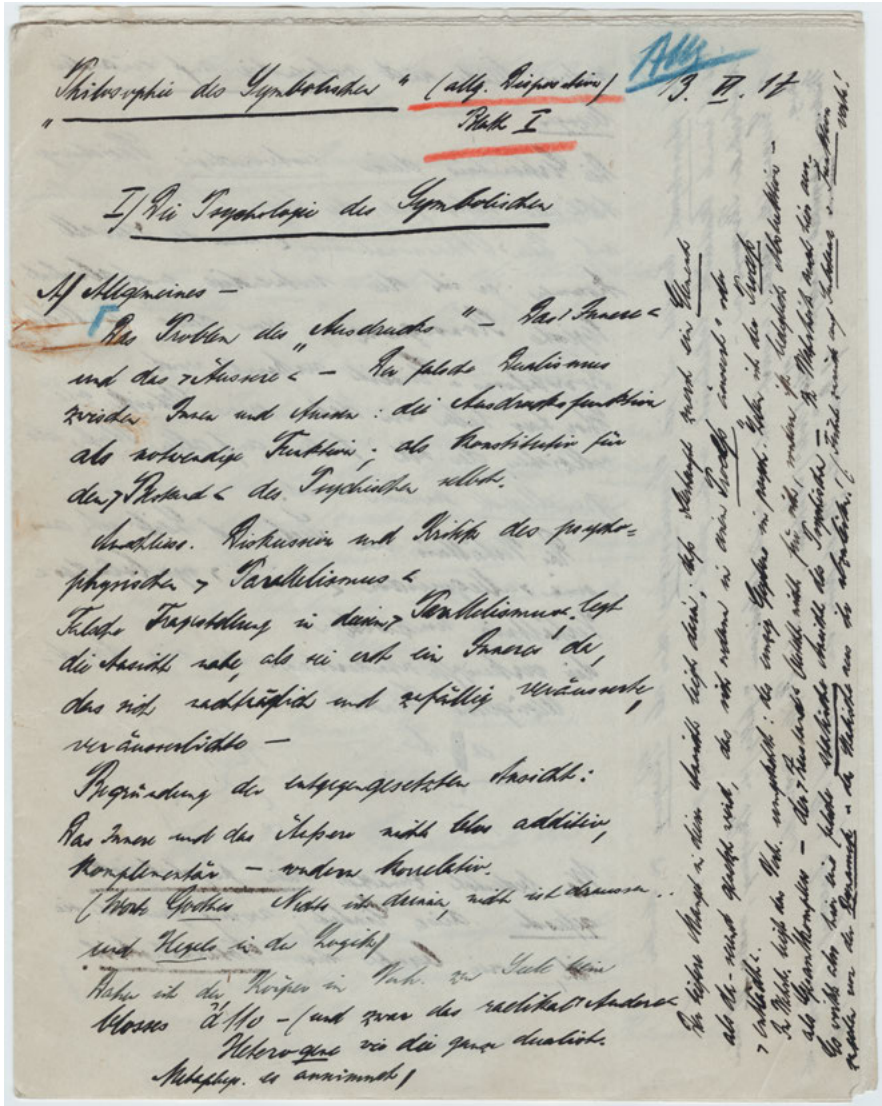


Fig. 1: Page 1 of Cassirer's "Disposition" for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

to “Sheet I,” in that it too reproduces in the first lines the keyword that the first sheet pursues over the course of eight pages: “(I) The Psychology of the Symbolic (see Sheet I).” This reproduction apparently has the exclusive goal of taking up the substantive structure of the first sheet and following up on it immediately by way of “(II) The Logic of the Symbolic.” Following this pattern are additional folded sheets that have been organized by the addition of “(II b)” to “(II f),” and which moreover have been marked with the description “General Disposition.”<sup>16</sup> The formal connection is unambiguous, and this “Disposition” for a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” is also apparently available in its complete form as judged by content. This *Disposition* was made available for the first time by the present study, and a transcription in English translation can be found in the appendix of this book.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond that, a larger group of records can be extracted from the research notes on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, a group that stands in close connection to the *Disposition* from 1917. In reviewing the material, which initially appears to be heterogeneous, there predominate at first glance certain groups of notes that bear the same title and are numbered consecutively. Because the titles are usually quite specific – for example, “Sentence, Sentence Structure” – they consist of only a few notes, and their numeration seldom reaches double digits. An exception is a more extensive group of records that have accumulated throughout a few library folders and which stand out due to their obvious similarity: the sheets, which are approximately of paper size A5, are, for one thing, numbered in the margins – as is the *Disposition*, in part – with variously colored pencils (red, blue, and green, as well as less often in ink or with a lead pencil), which is striking because Cassirer notably used colored pencils quite rarely; for another, the loose numeration of these sheets ranges from 1 to 241 (for the first thirty numbers in Roman numerals, but thereafter in Arabic numerals), which represents an extraordinarily extensive group of consecutively numbered records in Cassirer’s estate. This suggests that we have here a self-contained collection of

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<sup>16</sup> “(II b)” to “(II d)” are located in GEN MSS 98, Box 24, Folder 441,” while “(II e)” and “(II f),” in contrast, are located in Box 24, Folder 440 like “Sheet I.”

<sup>17</sup> I will cite this *Disposition* in what follows under the abbreviation “*Disposition 1917*,” with an indication of the page number that corresponds to the first eight pages numbered by Cassirer’s own hand, and which continues that pagination in a way that corresponds to the unambiguous sequence of the sheets given in the editorial appendix. In my citations from here on out, the quotation marks have been standardized for typographic reasons, since Cassirer, as noted also by Schwemmer (1997, pp. 16f.), does not use the various types of quotation marks consistently.



notes, which, moreover, can be reconstructed almost completely, since the majority of the 241 sheets are preserved in the estate.<sup>18</sup>

This supposition that what we have here is a larger collection of notes is initially superficial in the concrete sense that it is primarily based on the striking use of colored pencils and the extensive numeration. It can, however, be swiftly confirmed by means of a careful and detailed examination of the sheets, because the notes are also linked together in formal terms. A first proof can be seen in how they are labeled: the first notes are labeled by their numeration as “Sheet” [*Blatt*], with subsequent notes, up through approximately number 25, still bearing the abbreviation “S.” [*Bl.*], while sheets with higher numbers no longer exhibit any such label. This labeling, which seldom appears in texts from the estate, enables Cassirer, by means of the abbreviation “S.” and a number on the sheet in question, to demonstrate even in formal terms how the collection he is developing stands out from the rest of the research notes. That is, if we follow Cassirer’s references to his own notes, they almost exclusively employ the abbreviation of “S. [...]” that is also used in this numeration, and they lead back to the collection of 241 sheets that is reconstructed here. Likewise, the few references to titles or concepts can with high probability be matched up with other sheets from this collection of notes, even if the question of where all these references were supposed to lead cannot be resolved conclusively.<sup>19</sup> None-

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**18** Cf. the list of the sheets that can still be located in the appendix of the present volume. I will refer to these records in what follows as “Sheet n, p. q” where “n” indicates Cassirer’s numeration, albeit standardized with Arabic numerals, and q the page number. In instances where pagination by Cassirer’s own hand is lacking, I will indicate the location by giving a page number as determined in accordance with the sequence of pages, which as a rule permits the passage to be identified unequivocally. As in the case of the *Disposition*, I have standardized the quotation marks.

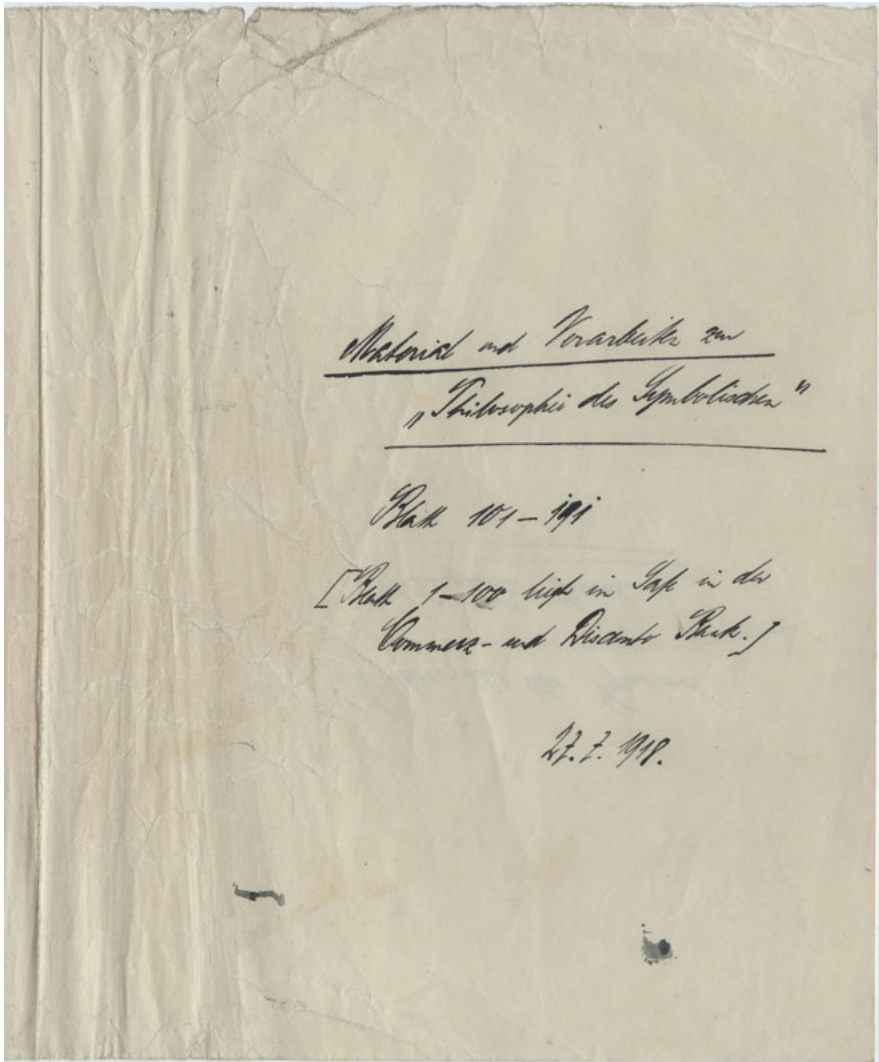
**19** There are five successive references that do not comply with the above schema: 1. Sheet 7, p. 1, in the margin: “for supplementation, see the *Metaphysics of the Problem of the Symbol and XXII, 2*”; 2. Sheet 17, p. 4, in the margin: “In particular, On the Metaphysics of the Symbolic Function at the conclusion of the whole!”; 3. Sheet 83, p. 2: “see citation of *Transcendental Psychology*”; 4. Sheet 173, p. 2: “To be implemented for various domains: Language – Art – Myth! – Knowledge) cf. *Concept of the Symbol in General*”; 5. Sheet 237, p. 1, apparently inserted, covering the margin: “also Life-Context see p. 2.” In these cases, Cassirer seems to be referring to other notes by means of their headings, which he does habitually in many working notes, and in this context the second and fifth references can potentially be understood instead as a way of calling attention in the margins of the notes to a text that has yet to be drafted. All references, however, are directed without further explanation to other sheets among these notes: the first two references can refer to numerous sheets on the metaphysics of the symbolic, of symbol-forms, or of the sign, because the following sheets have the word metaphysics in their title: Sheets 13, 17, 25, 43, 62, 88, 97, 115, and 229. The first reference is probably directed towards

theless, every indication is that these 241 sheets form a self-contained collection and document one phase of Cassirer's work on a "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

More precisely, we are dealing here with a first working phase following the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," as shown by the dating of the sheets. The decisive clue to this fact is provided by a larger folded sheet that contains a stack of sheets in library folder 429. In its present condition, the center of the front side of the sheet reads, in Cassirer's handwriting: "Philosophy of the Symbolic. Preliminary Work on Language" On the backside, in contrast, we find a centered inscription by Cassirer's hand that is written upside down. Written in black ink without any corrections or additions, this inscription seems to refer to the whole project: "Material and Preliminary Work on the 'Philosophy of the Symbolic' Sheets 101–191 [Sheets 1–100 are located in the safe in the Commerz- and Disconto Bank.] 27.7.1918" (see Fig. 2). It is impossible that this inscription could have been referring to any notes other than the collection reconstructed above. Like the designation "Sheet," both the unity and the extent of the numeration are unique in Cassirer's literary estate. Granted, there are a wide variety of numbered pages connected with Cassirer's working notes for the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. However, their numbers neither go as high as 191, nor are they marked as "sheets" or referred to as such. Moreover, this inscription – unlike the presumably more recent inscription on what is presently the front side, which speaks of "Preliminary Work on Language" – refers in a totally nonspecific way to "Material" and "Preliminary Work" for the whole "Philosophy of the Symbolic." This general title for records is not found anywhere else in the research notes, since the notes are consistently arranged according

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Sheet 15, whose own title refers in turn to Sheet 7, and which is also located in the estate as it currently stands right beside Sheet 7 in Box 29, Folder 548; furthermore, its title speaks of the "Problem of the Symbol" – a formulation seldom used by Cassirer. Even if the second reference is one of this sort at all, however, it cannot be determined to what, specifically, it refers, since no note on the metaphysics of the symbolic *function* can be found. The third reference to a note specified by Cassirer as the "citation of Transcendental Psychology" could, according to the heading, be directed towards Sheets 89, 90, and 100, where the first two follow directly after Sheet 83 in Box 24, Folder 442, and Sheet 100 can be found several sheets previously in the same folder. The fourth reference – to the "Concept of the Symbol in General" on Sheet 173 – would match up chiefly with Sheet 171 or 179, which lie in close proximity according to the numeration, but also to all sorts of other notes with the same heading, namely Sheets 32, 38, 89, 90, 91, 100, 115, 128, 137, 145, 156, 162, 190, and 229. The fifth reference is presumably directed to the second page of Sheet 237, where an addition in the margins begins with the words: "To discuss under 'Life-Context' -" These words, like the fifth reference, are underlined with a green colored pencil.



**Fig. 2:** Detail of the backside of a folded sheet in which a portion of the notes on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” have been inserted (Cassirer Papers, GEN MSS 98, Box 23, Folder 429).

to the individual themes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and their numeration does not reach the scale that we see here.

Cassirer obviously attributed a not insignificant value to this collection of notes when he entrusted the first hundred sheets to a bank safe. Nonetheless, the inscription on this larger sheet, which at one point probably contained “Sheets 101–191,” is more important for the purposes of dating, because according to it at least the sheets up through number 191 were produced by the middle of 1918. This dating is supported by the fact that the literature referenced throughout all these sheets is no more recent than 1918.<sup>20</sup> Cassirer’s references to his own writings also fit in with this picture.<sup>21</sup> Finally, all of the listed call numbers can be identified with those in the catalog at what is now the Berlin State Library. Obviously, Cassirer carried out his research there during his time in Berlin. The latter observations seem to suggest that even sheets 192 to 241 might have been produced not very much later, and in any case prior to fall 1919, when Cassirer moved to Hamburg and served as a professor at the newly founded university.

On first reading, the sheets are relatively quick to give evidence of various aspects of Cassirer’s work. First of all, there is some evidence that they were produced in approximately the same order in which they were numbered. The first ten or twenty sheets mostly bear headings that are quite general in tone, and they often develop independent conceptual reflections over the course of several pages, such as, e.g., “Language” (Sheets 2, 3, and 5), “On the progress of the symbolic from the simplest ‘sensory’ to the highest ‘spiritual’ level” (Sheet 4),

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**20** More precisely, it should be noted that none of the quoted and identifiable publications is more recent than 1917, aside from issue number 4/5 of the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* from 2/2/1918, which is mentioned by a reference on Sheet 116, specifically Eugen Fehrle’s review of Paul Ehrenreich’s *The Sun in Myth [Die Sonne im Mythos]* from 1915.

**21** Among the references to Cassirer’s own writings are five that are of interest to the question of dating, and which stand out from the bulk of the references to *Substance and Function*: On Sheet 6, p. 22, and Sheet 8, p. 8, Cassirer refers to the “Kant piece” or the “Kant book,” by which he is presumably referring to *Kant’s Life and Thought*, which appeared in 1918 as the final volume of the edition of Kant’s *Werke* edited by Cassirer himself; on Sheet 89, p. 12, we find in brackets the reference “cf. Problem of Knowledge III!” which certainly refers to the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age [Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit]*, on which work was concluded in 1919 and which appeared in 1920; because we are dealing here with a reference that lacks page numbers, it seems to me that it does not contradict the dating suggested here; finally, in *Disposition 1917*, p. 27, where he writes “cf. Plato = Collegium!!” Cassirer is probably referring to the “Lectures and Seminars” on Plato that, according to Paetzold (1995, p. 24), he delivered in the summer semesters of the years 1914, 1915, and 1916 as a private lecturer at what was then Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin.

“Symbolic Function (in General)” (Sheet 6), or “In General on the ‘Problem of the Symbol’” (Sheet 7). On the following sheets as well, Cassirer, usually in measured sentences, outlines his overall approach to the project or the way in which the project is structured. Throughout the higher numbers, in contrast, notes and titles become increasingly more specific, at which point the characteristic themes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* begin to predominate, first and foremost language, myth, and religion. These themes alternate with one another in a loose sequence; sometimes, however, they are also pursued continuously over the course of several sheets, as well as specified with keywords such as, e.g., “Proposition” (Sheets 50 and 170) and “Suffixes” (Sheet 66). Correspondingly, we find here brief excerpts from a book or article, or perhaps merely some useful information or an interesting citation from a text in the cultural sciences. Increasingly, the texts of other authors are already being quoted in the heading, followed by excerpts and discussions. Furthermore, a list of all sheets in ascending numeric order shows that excerpts from particular books or on particular themes are often pursued over the course of several successive sheets. Even the use of variously colored pencils for numeration and inks of various colors persisted over the course of several sheets, which suggests that these sheets were often written in one go.<sup>22</sup> In the sheets with higher numbers, Cassirer’s engagement with the literature of the cultural sciences is connected, again and again, with generalizations, which are also occasionally indicated in the title by the keyword “Concept of the Symbol.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, a generalization is occasionally signaled in the subtitle, as, for example, in “Myth, In General on the Symbol-Form” (Sheet 219). The sequence in which these sheets were created must ultimately remain a matter of speculation. Viewed in the sequence in which they were numbered, however, they give the impression of documenting the progress of a project containing a reciprocal interpenetration of the clarification of the concept, Cassirer’s increasingly in-depth reading of the literature of the cultural sciences, and the endeavor to establish a way of ordering the material that is philosophically feasible.

Furthermore, this “Preliminary Work for the ‘Philosophy of the Symbolic’” led to a first draft that Cassirer wrote prior to his move to Hamburg. To all appearances, the manuscript is based on the first collection of sheets, it is dated in the margin of the first page as “11.VII.19,” and it is marked at the end with

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<sup>22</sup> We are dealing here with black, brown, and green inks, and in the case of additions more rarely with blue and purple; aside from that, frequently with a mixture of black and green that is difficult to classify.

<sup>23</sup> For examples, cf. Sheets 32, 38, 89–91, 115, 128, 145, 171, 179, 229.

the date “19.8.19.”<sup>24</sup> It comprises 241 written pages, several of which were deleted in the process of revision, so that the running text only consists of 231 pages.<sup>25</sup> Numeration by Cassirer’s own hand begins at 1 and continues – because of several skips in the numeric sequence – to 234.<sup>26</sup> The text does not have any heading, but it is divided into three sections that are titled as follows: “The physical foundations of language acquisition – gesture language and spoken language” (pp. 1–58); “2. The modality of the linguistic form” (pp. 58–138); “3. Language and the structure of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ being” (pp. 139–234).<sup>27</sup>

The context in which this manuscript from summer 1919 might have arisen cannot be reconstructed conclusively, due to a lack of any overall heading or other references. Only several pre- and post-references in the notes point to the fact that we are dealing with the outline of a chapter on linguistic symbolization, which was supposed to be connected to a foundational chapter on the role of representation and symbolization for consciousness<sup>28</sup> and to lead to a further chapter on myth.<sup>29</sup> It thus appears that we are dealing with a chapter from an early, single-volume outline for a “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” although such a claim must nevertheless remain speculative in the absence of additional evidence. In contrast, we can establish that parts of this manuscript from 1919 are apparently taken up by the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic*

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**24** This manuscript is located in GEN MSS 98, Box 25, Folders 476 to 480.

**25** Alongside the deleted and omitted pages, I have not counted the continuation of the note on p. 185 (according to Cassirer’s pagination) onto the adjacent sheet.

**26** The following skips in the natural numeric sequence should be noted: p. 44, inserted: p. 44a, p. 45; p. 99, inserted: p. 99a, p. 100; after p. 139 follows p. 147, at which point the omission is noted in the margin at each end: “there follows p. 147[, pp.] 140–146 removed!” (p. 139) and “[follows from p. 139!]” (p. 147); p. 211, inserted: pp. 211a and 211b, p. 212.

**27** I will cite this manuscript in the present study with the abbreviation *Manuscript 1919*. Quotation marks will also be standardized in this case.

**28** A note on *Manuscript 1919*, p. 65, includes the reference regarding the role of representation for consciousness: “Cf. above Chapter I, in particular pp. – and – ff.” With respect to the differentiation of the “specific-individual modality” that is characteristic of the “concepts of the various sciences,” Cassirer refers back to the first chapter once again in a note on *Manuscript 1919*, p. 105: “For further details on this point, see above, Chapter 1, pp. – ff.; cf. in particular the more detailed exposition and justification in my work ‘Substance and Function,[?] Chapter 1.’” Finally, in a note on *Manuscript 1919*, p. 221, Cassirer directs the reader to “see above, Chapter 1, pp. – ff.” regarding the claim that the “possibility of every ‘symbolic formation’” depends on the “correlation” between the “universal” and the “individual.”

**29** A note on *Manuscript 1919*, p. 82, contains the following reference: “For further details concerning this form of mythical-magical thought, see Chapter 3.”

*Forms*, or at least served as a model for it.<sup>30</sup> This use of the existing outlines in the published text will not be reconstructed *en detail* in what follows, since it is not the goal of the present study to pursue the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* step by step on this textual level. However, the manuscript will, time and time again, offer valuable insights into the development of Cassirer's positions from the first records up through the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. I will consult it primarily in the third chapter, which will discuss Cassirer's reading of the cultural sciences by way of example via his engagement with Wilhelm Wundt and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Thus, in summary, we can give a quite precise sketch of the beginnings of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic. According to statements by Dimitry Gawronsky and Toni Cassirer, these beginnings lie in summer 1917, which can be confirmed by the *Disposition* on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from June 13, 1917. This *Disposition* does not make any reference to Sheets 1 to 241, which are nevertheless, for their part, coherent with it in terms of content. Thus, presumably, the *Disposition* actually emerged before these sheets and marks the start of Cassirer's new project. The title of a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is now incorporated into the inscription on the larger sheet that contains Sheets 101 to 191 as "Material and Preliminary Work on the 'Philosophy of the Symbolic'" and which is dated 7/27/1918. Consequently, at least large parts of the collection of 241 sheets were produced soon after the *Disposition*, such that Cassirer is able to gather them together in July 1918, after an initial working phase of approximately one year, in order to be able to use them as a foundation for the next steps in the process. Apparently, they served as the foundation for Cassirer's outline for a chapter concerning language from 1919, which was also partially included later in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Thus, the *Disposition* from 1917, the collection of sheets, and the manuscript from 1919 do more than account for the early beginning of Cassirer's work on his new project, which was supposed to lead to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. They also document the development of the project and the state of the work on it prior to Cassirer's move to Hamburg in fall 1919.

In Hamburg, Cassirer continued his work and became acquainted with the Warburg Institute, which inspired him to broaden his research in the cultural sci-

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**30** The sequence does not play any role in this acquisition: thus, Cassirer's engagement with Wilhelm Wundt's theory of the gesture stands almost at the beginning of the manuscript (cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 17 ff.), but is first found in the second chapter of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (cf. *ECW* 11, 122 ff.); on the other hand, the end of *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 221–234, apparently represents a precursor to the end of the first, historical chapter of the first volume (cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 112 ff.).

ences. This necessitated a new, more discriminating, and thematic grouping of the records, to which most of the material in the research notes on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* corresponds. Sheets 1 to 241, on the other hand, are ordered primarily by number and not by content, and they probably also document an earlier state of the work, as judged by this ostensible superficiality: they explored an open field of problems and phenomena that had yet to be organized systematically. As much as the sheets constitute a formally closed collection on the level of their reciprocal references, they do not to the same extent represent an ordered and self-contained unity in terms of content. We thus occasionally find stipulations for references that remain open, taking the form “S. ...”, which can be interpreted both as evidence for that formal coherence and as signs of Cassirer’s search for an order based on content. For that reason, we also find sporadic records that do not belong among the collection of sheets in a formal sense, but which were nevertheless apparently intended to establish a provisional order for the sheets.<sup>31</sup> With an eye towards the further progress of the work in Hamburg, we can suppose that Cassirer found increasing success in producing an order in which the themes of the later volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* would be differentiated and developed further. Ordering based on content was now predominant, since only the notes on very specific themes were still numbered consecutively, and so the pagination reached only the low double digits. Cassirer includes the old sheets at least partially in this new grouping: they received additional numbers and headings or were marked in

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**31** One example note from Box 24, Folder 440, demonstrates these organizational efforts in particular detail. To be sure, it does not belong in closer connection with the numbered sheets, but it is stored with them, and in particular with the larger sheet consulted for the purposes of dating. Moreover, it may have emerged from a review of the existing sheets, since, next to the heading “(1) The Problem (In General)” on the first of 14 pages, Cassirer noted in square brackets: “–89 reviewed.” On the following pages, correspondingly, we find only individually formulated sentences, but there are also numerous references to sheets that have been marked with clarifying keywords. The order of the references is prescribed primarily by the page headings, which list central questions from Cassirer’s work at the time: “Psychology – Signs and the Structure of Consciousness,” “Logic,” “Exact Science,” “Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” “Aesthetics,” “Subject and Object,” “Myth,” “Language,” and “Signs, General Modality.” Apparently, Cassirer engaged in a retrospective process of structuring, and in part also inserted references to higher page numbers at a later point in time in order to organize the compiled material and to reflect the progressing state of the work. Such notes, just as much as the excerpts and even the more self-contained sketches, document a process of thought and clarification that was indeed given a direction in advance, but which is nevertheless simultaneously tentative, a process in which fixation by flashes of insight plays no less of a supporting role than familiarization with the material, its incorporation into the structure of the *Disposition* or, if necessary, its possible adaptation.



the margin with additional keywords.<sup>32</sup> This process resulted in an ordering based on content, according to which the records could also finally be grouped systematically. This dominance of thematic over numeric ordering thus reflects a more advanced state of Cassirer's work.

In this first chapter, I will first show, with the help of the *Disposition* from 1917, how Cassirer outlines a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" and further subjects the foundations of his epistemo-critical writings to a revision. I will discuss this transformation of the epistemologist and philosopher of science into a philosopher of the symbol and of culture by pursuing the deliberations of the *Disposition* and exploring them section by section, as well as, where necessary, by consulting Cassirer's writings around 1917. It will thus become apparent how Cassirer generalizes his theory of the scientific concept into a conception of the symbolic that can, in turn, be specified for various fields of symbolization. Cassirer's operative use of the concept of the symbolic should therefore be related from the outset to the necessity of respecification, and it stands under the auspices of a culture that is quite differentiated in its own right. A central point of this expansion is that the scientific concept is classed among a variety of symbolizations, and that we can thereby reflect on its conditions in the context of culture and in particular in the context of language.

## The Prelude to the Disposition: The Question of the "Existence" of the Mental Itself

The *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from June 13, 1917, is already a tricky text, and so does not at all correspond to the ordinary style of Cassirer's works, with their confidently and rhetorically sophisticated, if occasionally overlong and somewhat unfocused, expositions.<sup>33</sup> That fact notwithstanding, the sequence of the pages can be reconstructed without any additional efforts,

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**32** Primarily, the sheets seem to me to have been incorporated thoroughly into the working notes on the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, at which point they lost any ordering of their own. The research notes in Folders 433 to 439 in Box 23 give a clear impression of this fact. Cf., e.g., the notes on onomatopoeia in Folder 435, among which Sheets 20, 47, 48, 65, and 177 were filed with a new numeration and in part by the addition of the new keyword.

**33** Barbara Naumann's impression that Cassirer was capable of "taking up a consistently and steadily calm, reflective position in his writing," irrespective of whether we are dealing with published writings or the "handwritten manuscripts of his essays and books, but also excerpts and scattered notes," or even Cassirer's "handwriting" and "typography," seems to me to follow a cliché that is all too widespread, and thereby to conceal a number of interesting aspects of Cassirer's working method; cf. Naumann (1998, p. 25).

and throughout these pages gradually unfolds a structure that, on a formal level, gives a self-contained form to the whole. The train of thought and the point to which it is headed, however, cannot be identified so easily. No wonder, for we are dealing with a process of brainstorming that is meant to help outline a still undetermined project and which was not intended for publication. Moreover, an understanding of the *Disposition* is made more difficult by the fact that it, on the one hand, is permeated by references back to Cassirer's previous writings, which their author is able to relegate to the brevity of mere indications and allusions. On the other hand, the *Disposition* sketches out a project that essentially goes beyond the limits of Cassirer's writings up to that time, a point which touches on both the objects under consideration and the fundamental conceptualizations involved. The *Disposition* is an outline that seeks to get a view of a new project by means of an implicit recourse to familiar elements, and, what is more, in the process it also has to disrupt the foundations of Cassirer's philosophizing. In what follows, I will discuss the beginnings of Cassirer's philosophy of culture with the help of the *Disposition* and in the context of his writings.

The structure of the *Disposition* can be given a quick overview. All eight pages of "Sheet I" are dedicated to the point "I) The Psychology of the Symbolic," which is repeated once again in a reference back to "Sheet I" at the beginning of "Sheet II a)," being followed immediately by "II) The Logic of the Symbolic." After that follow in more rapid succession: "III) The Number Function (N)," "IV) General Doctrine of Knowledge," and "V) The Fundamental Problems of Aesthetics," before a somewhat longer section, "VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic," concludes the *Disposition*. At first glance, it is noteworthy that the themes of the individual volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* are not mentioned, since neither language nor myth have been incorporated into the structure. Moreover, it is not merely the case that the *Disposition* lacks the rich material that will later fill the two volumes; initially, myth and language are not discussed at all. Only under bullet point "VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic" are they mentioned on the last two or three pages of the *Disposition* alongside other possible domains of objects. Knowledge and science do indeed play a substantial role in the structure, but they should still primarily be understood in the context of a reference back to *Substance and Function* from 1910, which is referred to repeatedly in the keywords.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the structure of the *Disposition* does not anticipate the ordering of the volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Instead, it much more closely re-

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Disposition 1917*, p. 1, in the margin, p. 11, and p. 20, in the margin.

veals Cassirer's points of origin. In this respect, what is of the greatest significance is the fact that, in contrast to language and myth, "aesthetics" is given a bullet point of its own alongside the "doctrine of knowledge." This should count as an indication that *Freedom and Form* from 1916 played a central role in the genesis of the project of a philosophy of the symbolic, since this is the work in which aesthetics first comes to prominence in Cassirer's writings.<sup>35</sup> The structure of the *Disposition* thus reveals the substantive points of departure in the realms of science and art that Cassirer used to pave the way towards a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" and towards phenomena like language and myth. For this reason, the *Disposition* for the new project, together with its continuities and discontinuities with Cassirer's works up until that time, can only be presented in detail by recourse to the two earlier writings *Substance and Function* and *Freedom and Form*.<sup>36</sup>

The first section of the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is just as concise as it is specific: "The problem of 'expression' – the 'inner' and the 'outer' – The false dualism between inside and outside: the function of expression as a necessary function; as constitutive for the 'existence' of the mental itself" (*Disposition 1917*, p. 1). The prominence of the concept of "expression" is a striking contrast to Cassirer's earlier writings. This concept, however, like other formulations, allows for a variety of connotations, which Cassirer neither puts in the effort to narrow down nor to clarify with any terminological precision. In a few notable places, however, Cassirer explains his point of departure quite clearly: the "psychology of the symbolic" that he seeks to approach connects to the "problem of 'expression'" the thesis that there can be an "inner" only in connection with an "outer." After brief hints at a "critique of psychophysical 'parallelism,'" which on Cassirer's view is based entirely too much on the givenness of a mental "inner,"<sup>37</sup> Cassirer explains his "opposing view," which strictly excludes any inner that is supposed to be independent of an outer: "The inner and the outer not merely additive, complementary – but rather correlative" (*Disposition 1917*, p. 1).

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35 Ernst Wolfgang Orth has repeatedly made reference to the essential role of this work for the development of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*; cf., e.g., Orth (2004, pp. 34f.).

36 I am initially setting aside here the no less significant work *Kant's Life and Thought*, since I will delve into the significance of Cassirer's renewed reading of Kant around 1917 in the second chapter.

37 "An incorrect question in this 'parallelism'; suggests the view that there is first an inner, which subsequently and accidentally externalizes itself, comes to the surface –" (*Disposition 1917*, p. 1).

This first approach to a “psychology of the symbolic” that is apparently supposed to apprehend everything ‘mental’ in connection with its external expression represents a striking conflict in Cassirer’s writings between new questions and well-known arguments. The resulting tensions are already evident in the formulation of the “‘existence’ of the mental itself.” Namely, the language of ‘existence’ comes from an epistemological discussion, the narrow limits of which Cassirer wants to overcome by means of his new project of a philosophy of the symbolic, initially by using rather vague labels like that of expression. On Sheet 13, with the title “On the Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” Cassirer himself observes just how questionable the concept of existence is against this background. He situates this concept first in the realm of logic: “The whole development of ‘pure logic,’ as opposed to the psychological, leads to the establishment of a stripped-down existence of the logical, a pure being of logical ‘objects,’ independently of the processes through which they come to be established in the consciousness of single individuals” (Sheet 13, p. 1).<sup>38</sup> The language of existence is thus closely connected with the “development of the concept of validity” as distinguished from being, in which context Hermann Lotze, who was also mentioned by Cassirer, proved to be exceptionally influential.<sup>39</sup> Cassirer holds this position “within the realm of logic” to be “indisputable; but it is worth recognizing that this concept of ‘existence’ is also simply nothing more than the highest logical symbol” (Sheet 13, p. 2).<sup>40</sup> Now, however, Cassirer sets myth in opposition to the tendency of the “basic function of logic, in accordance with its nature” to transform “everything into ‘existence’ and ‘validity,’” since myth, “according to its function, transforms everything into life.” According to Cassirer, therefore, mythos and logos form an “antinomy,” because they each have elements of lawfulness in their own right, which are nevertheless mutually contradictory: “both standpoints are not absolute; neither of them gives ‘the’ essence per se, but rather only one specific perspective from which that essence is observed by us –.” The concept of existence thus has its place in the context of logic and beyond that “perspective” can only count as a questionable and illegitimate transposition: “Even the concept of ‘existence’ is – only a metaphor! In this way, the conflict between logicism and psychologism is also dissolved for us” (Sheet 13, p. 3).<sup>41</sup>

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**38** This sheet was published in the “Supplement” of *ECN* 1, pp. 269–271, and is thus easily accessible. The editor’s dating to c. 1921–1927, however, must be corrected in favor of 1917 to 1918.

**39** Cf. Sheet 13, p. 1, and on the historical context Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 201 and 215–208).

**40** Cf. also the following quotations from Sheet 13, pp. 2f.

**41** This limitation of “existence” and “validity” to the field of logic thus differs from the solution that Cassirer characterizes as follows in “Hermann Cohen and the Renewal of Kantian Phi-

With these observations as a reaction to the psychologism dispute, Cassirer is arguing for a critical distinction between logic and psychology, in order to differentiate their “perspectives” and to defend the justification of each against any reductionism. He himself, however, seems to overlook the necessity of this critical distinction when, right at the beginning of the *Disposition*, he inquires into the “‘existence’ of the mental itself” under the title of the “psychology of the symbolic.” This negligence should probably be taken as evidence that Cassirer is seeking to apprehend his new avenue of inquiry by taking *Substance and Function* as his point of departure, while simultaneously broadening its conceptual foundations. First, it should be noted unequivocally that the question of the “‘existence’ of the mental itself” cannot be found previously in his writings. It was not formulated there as such, but nevertheless it does come up, as I will demonstrate momentarily. Namely, in the epistemo-critical writings, the question of consciousness arises specifically in relation to the existence and the validity of knowledge. It is apparently this epistemo-critical constellation that continues to have an effect in the *Disposition* for the project of a philosophy of the symbolic, but which is now put to a new use, one which employs familiar conceptual means to take a decisive step beyond the limits of Cassirer’s epistemo-critical writings. For this reason, we must return to Cassirer’s earlier conception of consciousness in order to give a more precise profile of the new approach to the question of the “‘existence’ of the mental itself,” and furthermore to be able to understand it as a reaction to systematic problems in Cassirer’s epistemo-criticism.

## Consciousness and Knowledge in Substance and Function

The question of consciousness or of the mental is by no means completely foreign to *Substance and Function*.<sup>42</sup> In the last chapter of the work, “On the Psychology of Relations,” Cassirer engages with the psychology of his day, a theme to which the *Disposition* already seems to take up in its first bullet

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losophy” [“Hermann Cohen und die Erneuerung der Kantischen Philosophie”] from 1912 with a view to his system of theory, ethics, and aesthetics: “The various subspecies of the comprehensive idea of *validity* are enumerated within this unity. Pre-critical idealism failed to realize this double turn, for from its perspective the world melted into a uniform unit of validity” (Cassirer 2015a, p. 232). I will address the interpretation of Kant that is connected to this point and the aspiration to a system of philosophy in the second chapter.

<sup>42</sup> This holds true for Cohen and Natorp as well; on the Neo-Kantian discussion of “transcendental psychology,” cf. also Knoppe (1992, pp. 63–79).

point, “The Psychology of the Symbolic.”<sup>43</sup> The focus of the chapter is primarily a critique of theories of knowledge that begin with a consciousness, with its faculties and ideas, and which are therefore based on psychological-empiricist theories. Similarly, in this piece, Cassirer is already turning decisively against every “analysis of being into an inner and an outer world,” as he does once again at the beginning of the *Disposition* from 1917, where he employs the concept of expression (Cassirer 1923, p. 274).<sup>44</sup> Admittedly, the turning point and the linchpin of Cassirer’s argument in *Substance and Function* is neither expression nor the symbolic, but rather knowledge and the concept. As such, the correlation between “inner” and “outer” here is marked by the objectivity of a conception of knowledge that only incorporates consciousness and mental activity to the extent that they can be disentangled from all merely subjective aspects and individual-contingent achievements.<sup>45</sup> The “mental” already has “existence” in Cassirer’s epistemo-critical writings – this existence, however, has standing exclusively in the realm of the logical validity of knowledge.

To elucidate this connection between the existence of consciousness and the validity of knowledge, we must first return briefly to the theory of the relational-functional concept. In *Substance and Function*, Cassirer inquires, in proper Neo-Kantian tradition, into the necessary conditions for the validity of scientific cognitions, and in the first part of the book he begins by discussing in particular the recent development of mathematics and the exact sciences. The central theme of his theory of the scientific concept can be seen in the claim that knowledge is of an essentially conceptual-relational structure, which holds true both for the object as well as for the operation of cognition. On the side of the object, Cassirer develops his theory of the concept primarily through the paradigm of numerical concepts. Numbers exist by means of a relation that generates them in accordance with their magnitude, and which simultaneously orders them, defines them, and determines them in terms of their sequence: every number has precisely one place in the relational order and is, as a mathematical construct, nothing other than the determinacy of this place within the series of all numbers.<sup>46</sup> “[T]he ‘construct’ is to gain its total [existence] from the relations in which it

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 326–346).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also the whole passage, Cassirer (1923, pp. 271–279).

<sup>45</sup> On the first page of the chapter on the “Psychology of Relations,” Cassirer puts forth this premise: “The question, as to how this whole [of possible knowledge, A.S.] is *realized* in the knowing individuals, must be subordinated, as long as we are concerned with understanding the pure system of foundations and deducing it in its truth” (Cassirer 1923, p. 326).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. on this point Cassirer (1923, pp. 58–62).

stands,” as Cassirer puts it in reference to Frege, but also in agreement with his own understanding of number (Cassirer 1923, p. 46).<sup>47</sup>

It is this form of relational determination that, according to Cassirer, gives the standard for all scientific knowledge. Thus, the empirical sciences by no means proceed, as does mathematics, in a purely constructive manner, but rather, in continuity with the mathematical concept, are attempts at “grasping the ‘given’ in series, and of assigning it a fixed place within these series” (Cassirer 1923, p. 148).<sup>48</sup> Based on the premise of mathematical structures, thus, in physics too the object is understood in a purely relational manner: “The sensuous quality of a thing becomes a physical object, when it is transformed into a serial determination” (Cassirer 1923, p. 149). By means of this “arrangement of the factual in series”<sup>49</sup> of mathematical origin, every object of knowledge becomes, like a mathematical construct, the “bearer and the starting-point of certain judgments, as a totality of possible relations.”<sup>50</sup> The function of the scientific concept is to establish systems of relations that allow the given to be classified in terms of lawful interconnections and to be explained thereby. Cassirer thus opposes any view of the concept that understands it, as in the Aristotelian tradition, as an abstraction from shared characteristics of empirically given objects.<sup>51</sup>

The theory of the relational-functional concept does not, on Cassirer’s view, have consequences merely for our understanding of the object, but also of the operation of cognition: the process of cognition must be understood to be just as relational as its objects if it is to be able to identify them. From this claim, Cassirer first concludes critically that knowledge can never be traced back to isolable facts, and in particular that any empiricist psychology of sensation and association must be inadequate.<sup>52</sup> On a positive note, this situation gives rise to the ideal of a knowledge in which the object and the operation of cognition are not only both determined in an essentially relational fashion, but in which their structures are closely linked with one another: knowledge would then come into effect specifically when the operation of cognition itself realizes in time the relations that determine the object. Under this assumption, Cassirer is able to advocate for the thesis that the logical “existence” of the object is not in-

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. also Cassirer (1923, pp. 38–41).

<sup>48</sup> For further discussion on this point in dialogue with Rickert, cf. also Cassirer (1923, pp. 223 f.).

<sup>49</sup> Cassirer (1923, p. 150).

<sup>50</sup> Cassirer (1923, p. 33). On the “epitome,” cf. also Cassirer (1923, pp. 23 f. and 248 f.).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 4–21).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 245–249).

dependent of thought even in the realm of mathematics. Rather, it can and must be conceived of in the context of cognition, where the relational laws determine both the object as well as the operation of cognition and thereby ensure that the operations of thought in their temporal sequence correspond to the logical structure of the mathematical construct: “The progress of the judgment according to law is the correlate of the unification of relations according to law in the object of knowledge” (Cassirer 1923, p. 315).<sup>53</sup> This correlation explains, on the one hand, how the existence of the logical can and must be conceived of, without simply reducing it to the temporal operations of thought, together with their contingent aspects. On the other hand, by contrast, this correlation also determines thought: were it not bound by the logical constitution and existence of its object, it would itself lose all structure and all permanence.

Consequently, the theory of knowledge in *Substance and Function* provides a framework within which the question of the mental as such can be formulated. Any possible answer must therefore draw out the consequences from Cassirer’s theory of the concept, and as such understand consciousness, in the first place, as being composed essentially of relations and, secondly, conceptualize it by beginning with that correlation between the operation and the object of cognition. It is precisely these two aspects that Cassirer emphasizes in his brief statements on the “psychology of relations.” So that mental life can in principle be up to the task of accounting for the conceptual-relational structure of the objects of knowledge, he conceives of it as a concatenation of lived experiences, which in each case attain a determinate meaning by reference to the whole of consciousness. Even the simplest experience is supposed to make its objects accessible by classifying them in terms of prior relations and determining them in connection with the whole of experience: “All consciousness demands some sort of connection; and every form of connection presupposes a relation of the individual to an inclusive whole, presupposes the insertion of the individual content into some systematic totality. However primitive and undeveloped this system may be conceived to be, it can never wholly disappear without destroying the individual content itself” (Cassirer 1923, pp. 296f.). To get to the heart of his central intention of conceiving of consciousness, unlike empiricist-psychological theories, as basically relational and holistic, Cassirer introduces the concept of representation: “Hence if we understand ‘representation’ as the expression of an ideal

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. the surrounding statements as a whole, up through Cassirer (1923, p. 317). Several pages later, Cassirer emphasizes his argument once again: “The real *content* of the object of thought, to which knowledge penetrates, corresponds therefore to the active *form* of thought in general. In the realm of rational knowledge, as in that of empirical, the same problem is set” (Cassirer 1923, p. 322).



rule, which connects the present, given particular with the whole, and combines the two in an intellectual synthesis, then we have in ‘representation’ no mere subsequent determination, but a constitutive condition of all experience” (Cassirer 1923, p. 284).<sup>54</sup> It is this perspective on consciousness that Cassirer pursues in the last chapter of *Substance and Function*. His engagement with the psychology of his day, however, in light of the then-dominant theory of association, remains essentially critical and must ultimately, despite this or that approach that he evaluates positively, be content with the “demand for a *psychology of relations*” that is supposed to lead to a “transformation of psychological methods in general” (Cassirer 1923, pp. 326f.).<sup>55</sup>

The second consequence of Cassirer’s epistemo-critical perspective on consciousness pertains to the connection between “inner” and “outer.” The reason is that consciousness can only bring about representation in cognition to the extent that it puts into effect relational structures that find their counterpart in a conceptually determined object. Consciousness thus presupposes in all of its representations what Cassirer had defined as a genuine accomplishment of the concept – and not of subjective faculties: “Consciousness *as consciousness* would be extinguished, not only if we conceived the sensuous phenomena, such as the colors and tones, the smells and tastes to be removed, but also if we conceived the ‘metaphenomenal’ objects, such as plurality and number, identity and difference to be removed. The existence of consciousness is rooted merely in the mutual correlativity of the two elements, and neither is to be preferred to the other as ‘first’ and original” (Cassirer 1923, p. 340). Accordingly, without the function of the concept and without “logical principles,”<sup>56</sup> consciousness

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**54** On representation, cf. the whole passage, Cassirer (1923, pp. 282–286). On Cassirer’s analysis of representation and consciousness, cf. also Kreis (2009, pp. 213–256). Kreis’ systematic interpretation, however, does not distinguish between Cassirer’s epistemo-critical texts and those on the philosophy of the symbolic.

**55** Primarily, Cassirer gives a positive evaluation (cf. Cassirer 1923, pp. 331ff.) to the essay that is today regarded as the prelude to gestalt psychology, namely Christian von Ehrenfels’ “On Gestalt Qualities” [“Über Gestaltqualitäten”] from 1890. Beyond his reference to Ehrenfels’ groundbreaking essay, however, Cassirer’s discussions of the “psychology of relations” may also have been closely intertwined with the debates of his own day, as Poggi (1995, pp. 237–239) has already suggested. Poggi, however, focused his article on the close relationship of Cassirer’s later texts on the philosophy of culture to gestalt psychology, which has quite rightly drawn some attention; cf. Plümacher (1997). In contrast, the references of Cassirer’s *Substance and Function* to psychological discussion prior to gestalt psychology have, to my knowledge, hardly been given any attention.

**56** “Without logical principles, which go beyond the content of given impressions, there is as little a consciousness of the ego as there is a consciousness of the object” (Cassirer 1923, p. 295). Cf. a similar passage in Cassirer (1923, pp. 309f.).

would not be conceivable. That is, it only attains permanence in correlation to objects, whose own existence in turn depends on their conceptual determination. Consciousness has thus, as it were, borrowed its “existence” from the concept, because without the logical structure of that which is thought it would be only an unstable and hopeless chaos. In positive terms, consciousness, in this dependence on the concept, is, even at the point of its greatest “inwardness,” related constitutively to an “outer”: since it depends on the logical “existence” of knowledge, it cannot be conceived of without the equiprimordial, “external” thing that is known.<sup>57</sup> It is, as it were, animated by this “‘transsubjective’ element” of the concept (Cassirer 1923, p. 297).

The “false dualism between inside and outside” that Cassirer opposes in the first lines of the *Disposition* from 1917 is thus already basically put into question in *Substance and Function*. The parallel is clear to see: just as, in the epistemo-critical work, consciousness cannot develop any immanent sphere because it, as a thing which knows, has to accept the function of the concept and the existence of what is known, so too, in the *Disposition*, is the psyche bound up with an “outside” because it requires expression and must thereby presuppose the “function of the symbol as a ‘transition’ from ‘inner’ to ‘outer’” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 8).<sup>58</sup> Expression thus takes the place of knowledge, while the symbolic takes the place of the concept. This parallel is the basis for several important conceptual continuities, but the decisive difference consists in the fact that the dependence of consciousness on an “outer” in *Substance and Function* stands under the auspices of scientific knowledge. The “existence” of consciousness should not be understood here, as it is in the *Disposition* from 1917, as at best a “metaphor” in the sense used by Sheet 13, but rather refers to the strict sense of logical-objective validity.<sup>59</sup> Not only cognition, but also consciousness as a whole, is thus dependent on the objectivity of knowledge.

In the framework of Cassirer’s epistemo-criticism, therefore, consciousness is anything but merely subjective in the colloquial sense; rather, it functions vir-

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57 This argumentation naturally, as is noted at least in the margin, follows the trail blazed by Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism” in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; cf. *CPR*, B 274–279, to which Cassirer also refers explicitly and repeatedly in the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic”; cf., e.g., Sheet 8, p. 2, in the margin, and Sheet 18, p. 6.

58 For an explanation of Cassirer’s concept of function and his understanding of the concept as function, cf. also Kreis (2009, pp. 60–90).

59 Cassirer clarifies his use of the concept of existence by way of example in Cassirer (1923, pp. 90f.). It should at least be noted here in passing that Martin Heidegger, in an article from 1953, characterizes technology in relation to “existence” in an allusion to this logical-mathematical tradition; cf. Heidegger (1977, in particular pp. 17 ff.).

tually as a medium for objective knowledge. Namely, its task is to eliminate more and more everything merely subjective from experience in a continuous process of objectivization.<sup>60</sup> The reason is that lawfulness, thanks to its correlation of knowing to the known, is not given from the outset. It is the provisional result of the process of cognition itself, in which the operation as well as the object of knowledge are in one respect determined and normalized, while all other, merely subjective aspects, both on the side of consciousness and on the side of the object, are eliminated. In the chapter on the “Concept of Reality,” Cassirer thus begins with an “immediate experience” that “is shown to be wholly foreign” to “the opposition of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’” (Cassirer 1923, p. 272). These two poles of experience are subsequently differentiated from one another, however, to the effect that the changing aspects of experience, which are valid only in a limited way, are distinguished from the persistent aspects, which are supposed to be applicable on the whole.<sup>61</sup> From this perspective, “objective” and “subjective” designate different degrees of the validity of experiential judgments, as becomes clear in Cassirer’s classical example of secondary qualities: the perception of colors is “more subjective” than the “objective” explanation of objects by way of physics.<sup>62</sup> If experience is “subjective,” then, it is not in the sense of an immanent sphere of ideas opposed to external things. Rather, that sphere was eliminated early on in the “series of degrees of objectivity” and assigned to a less comprehensive circle of validity for items of knowledge (Cassirer 1923, p. 275).

Thus, in summation, it cannot at all be said that consciousness is the focus of Cassirer’s theory of knowledge, and even less that it represents that theory’s foundation. However, that theory very much does make use of it. It is not just that consciousness can only justify any permanence of its own by way of the existence of knowledge, and thereby with the presupposition of the scientific concept. Consciousness is thereby characterized from the outset by the correlation between “inside” and “outside,” which, in *Substance and Function*, is justified

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**60** Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 302ff.).

**61** “We find connections, which hold their ground though all further experimental testing and through apparently contrary instances, and remain steadfast in the flux of experience while others dissolve and vanish. It is the former, that we call ‘objective’ in a pregnant sense, while we designate the latter by the term ‘subjective.’ We finally call objective those elements of experience, which persist through all change in the here and now, and on which rests the unchangeable character of experience; while we ascribe to the sphere of subjectivity all that belongs to this change itself, and that only expresses a determination of the particular, unique here and now. The result of thus deriving the distinction between the subjective and the objective, is that it has merely *relative* significance” (Cassirer 1923, p. 273).

**62** On the example of secondary qualities, see the whole passage, Cassirer (1923, pp. 274–277).

by the objective validity of knowledge and the lawfulness of cognition. For this reason, consciousness is constitutively bound up with a process of objectivization that aims at a comprehensive “objectivity” and to that end eliminates the more or less limited circles of validity of the “merely subjective.” When Cassirer, in the chapter “On the Psychology of Relations,” characterizes consciousness by the fact that, in its experience, it carries out an “insertion of the individual content into some systematic totality . . . [h]owever primitive and undeveloped this system may be conceived to be,” he thereby sows in the simplest forms of experience the seeds of an objectivization that will only come to fruition in the sciences (Cassirer 1923, p. 297).<sup>63</sup> Consciousness is thus marked by a teleology of objective knowledge, to the point that it can itself, in the final analysis, be comprehended as an expression of the logical-conceptual lawfulness of knowledge, which has from the beginning preserved the relation to the objects of experience, and which must ultimately coincide with the objectivity of scientific knowledge. In this sense, in *Kant’s Life and Thought*, Cassirer identifies “subjectivity” itself with the lawfulness of cognition: since, according to the “revolution in the way of thinking,” the validity and necessity of the judgment is only supposed to be clarified by returning to the subject of cognition, it must be the case that “the concept of the subjective expresses a foundation in a necessary procedure and a universal law of reason” (Cassirer 1981, p. 151).<sup>64</sup>

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**63** Cf. once again the previously cited passage on the same page. Cassirer thus speaks of an “unbroken development from the first stages of objectification to its completed scientific form,” and in this passage he takes as his point of departure for this development towards science a “simple sensory impression” and the judgment that we are seeing something red (Cassirer 1923, p. 277). Cassirer’s fascinating approach from the 1940s, that of describing sensory perception by recourse to mathematical group theory, also operates within the same perspective; cf. *ECW* 24, pp. 209–250, as well as *ECN* 8, pp. 135–181.

**64** Cassirer similarly emphasizes several times that this fact thus dissolves the association of the concept of subjectivity with the “appearance of individuality and arbitrariness” (Cassirer 1981, p. 151), or even with “human nature,” as understood by Locke and Hume” (Cassirer 1981, p. 153): “It is no longer possible to confuse this subjectivity of reason with the subjectivity of arbitrariness or of psychophysical organization, since the former must be assumed and implied even to dispose of the latter” (Cassirer 1981, p. 152). And even more clearly: “The ‘subjectivity’ that was the starting point of transcendental reflection has until now been presented in a precisely defined, terminologically restricted sense. It meant going in no way beyond the bounds of the individual knower, nor beyond the psychological processes through which the world of sensations, of ideas and their connection, is generated for an individual. Rather, it held fast only to this: that determination of the pure *form* of knowledge must precede determination of the object of knowledge. In conceiving space as a unitary synthetic procedure, the lawfulness of geometric and physical geometric forms is revealed to us. When we analyze the method of experiment, and point out the pure concepts of magnitude and mass, and the universal presuppositions of per-

Consciousness, therefore, can only be the subject of discussion in *Substance and Function* to the extent that it puts itself in the service of objective knowledge. All other aspects of consciousness and its experience can only be characterized negatively, as “merely subjective” in the sense of a limited and deficient form of objectivization without its own structure and its own legitimacy.<sup>65</sup> It is hardly surprising for a theory of knowledge to overlook the individual consciousness in this way. What is more serious, however, is the fact that it seems to close off any way of inquiring into any such conditions of knowledge that are not themselves a part of scientific knowledge and the process of objectivization.

## The “Psychology of the Symbolic” on this Side of Knowledge

Against this backdrop, we can now work out the new accents of the “Psychology of the Symbolic” from the *Disposition* from 1917 without having to deny the continuity that is present in the configuration of the argument and the central terminology. The question of the “‘existence’ of the mental itself” is introduced as a key point, a fact which highlights both continuities and discontinuities. The language of “existence” is reminiscent, on the one hand, of the connection to the epistemo-critical discussions that has been outlined. On the other hand, Cassirer is now aiming with this concept, as was made clear on Sheet 13 by reference to the exposition of its originally logical character, beyond the field of knowledge. This intention is revealed by the introduction of the concept of expression, a concept which is held open and which permits association with a wider field of experience on this side or that of knowledge. However, it is primarily the first ex-

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manence and causal dependence in it, we have thereby accounted for the universality and the objective validity of experiential judgments through their true origin. The ‘subject’ spoken of here is hence none other than reason itself, in its universal and its particular functions” (Cassirer 1981, p. 193). Subsequently, Cassirer goes on to describe the individual and empirical consciousness as the correlate of objectivity thus understood: “Only now is the relation between inner and outer experience, between self-consciousness and consciousness of the object, clarified. These two do not comprise ‘halves’ of experience as a whole, which subsist independently of each other, but they are conjoined in the same ensemble of universally valid and necessary logical presuppositions, and inseparably related to each other through this ensemble. We now no longer ask how the ‘I’ makes contact with things in themselves, nor how things in themselves begin to participate in the ‘I.’ Now the expression for both ‘self’ and ‘object’ is one and the same: the lawfulness of ‘experience in general’ signified in the concept of transcendental apperception. This is the sole mediator and agency for us of any entities whatsoever, be they of inner or of outer sense” (Cassirer 1981, p. 198).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 278f. and 295f.).

ample of the reciprocal relationship between “inside” and “outside” in expression that points beyond the structuring of experience in objective knowledge, or more precisely which points back to more fundamental contexts in which experience is structured. Cassirer refers in particular to embodiment when he, in the first two pages, argues against the “psycho-physical ‘parallelism’” of the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, which “suggests the view that there is first an inner, which subsequently and accidentally externalizes itself, comes to the surface –” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 1). Instead, according to Cassirer, we should begin with a “correlational unity” in the “relation between mind and lived body,” which he understands in contrast to any “occasionalism” as a “symbolic” unity, which is where he employs this concept for the first time in the *Disposition* – aside from in the headings: “The relation between mind and lived body must be converted from an ‘allegorical’ relationship into a ‘symbolic’ relationship: the connected ‘otherness’ into a doubly relational unity” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 2).

The attempt to explain the symbolic relationship by means of the paradigm of the “relation between mind and lived body” is well-known in Cassirer’s writings. And he by no means formulates this paradigm for the first time in the well-known passage from the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>66</sup> Already in *Leibniz’ System in its Scientific Foundations* from 1902, he touches on Leibniz’ intertwining of body and consciousness, which he quite casually describes as a symbolic relationship.<sup>67</sup> In *Freedom and Form*, he returns to this intertwining of “bodily” and “spiritual events” in Leibniz: “from the beginning, the one should only be thought of alongside the other and as an expression of the other. Every inner is an outer, just as every outer is an inner” (*ECW 7*, p. 87).<sup>68</sup> However, he now poses these thoughts in the context of the aesthetics of the 18th century and the emancipation from the senses that is indicated by the talk of “expression.” The *Disposition* from 1917 follows up on this sort of language and the aesthetic tradition that is dealt with in *Freedom and Form*, as the following section will demonstrate in more detail. The *Disposition*, however, hardly explains the “relation between mind and lived body” beyond what has been said, and the somewhat more detailed discussion of this relationship on Sheet 30 operates in close proximity to *Freedom and Form*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ECW 13*, p. 113: “The relationship of the mind and the lived body constitutes the prototype and model for a purely *symbolic* relation, which cannot be rethought either in terms of a thing-relation or a causal-relation.”

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ECW 1*, pp. 363–365.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. the whole passage, *ECW 7*, pp. 87–92.

<sup>69</sup> Cassirer articulates this relation by reference to spatial perception and contra the “theory of unconscious inferences”: “We do not merely ‘transfer’ the inner into the ‘outer’; we do not mere-

Nevertheless, these references to the “relation between mind and lived body” are revealing with respect to the systematic significance of this paradigm for the symbolic relation. What is important is not merely that Cassirer emphasizes the reciprocal entanglement between inner and outer via the concept of the symbolic. At the same time, he is also apparently aiming, in connection with the aesthetic tradition, at levels of experience that precede knowledge and cannot be reduced to it. He is thus attempting to overcome the limits of the epistemo-critical investigation in *Substance and Function*, which both begins and ends with knowledge, given that it does not merely presuppose knowledge, but also ultimately considers consciousness itself, in the context of the structuring of perception, solely by reference to the continual process of objectivization. In contrast, the *Disposition* from 1917 opens up, in connection with *Freedom and Form*, the possibility of being able to consider the process of cognition in a larger context. On this side of the horizon of knowledge, we should consider the previously existing and independent structurings of experience and the forms of correlation between “inside” and “outside” that are alluded to in the relation between mind and lived body as well as by the concept of expression.

A similar shift can be seen in the explanation of “[r]epresentation’ as a mentally constitutive basic element,” which already played an important role in the final chapter of *Substance and Function* and which likewise serves as a focal point for the notes on the “Psychology of the Symbolic” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 3). This shift, like the correlation between “inner” and “outer,” carries Cassirer beyond the limits of the epistemo-critical work and the objectivity of scientific knowledge. He begins with the “character of the mental as such” and characterizes it, in contrast to the “physical,” by the fact “it not only ‘is,’ but rather goes beyond itself as a mere state of being; it ‘signifies’ and ‘means’ something else (a second) and ultimately a whole series of others” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 3). In the next step, Cassirer emphasizes the fact that a representation [*Vorstellung*] that signifies or means something is “only possible by means of this representative; better: originally presentative function” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 3). A similar claim can already be found in *Substance and Function*. There, Cassirer had described representation as a constitutive entanglement of individual lived experience with the overall nexus of experience, to the effect that it identifies the necessary condition for every “present content” to consciousness: “Without this apparent representation, there would be no presentation, no immediately present content;

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ly ‘have’ impressions as something non-spatial and then make an inference from them to a spatial world... rather, both are one, are ‘particular’ (The inner ‘is’ the outer, the outer the inner!)] Both the ‘sign’ and its ‘significance’ behave like lived body and mind, which [are] related to one another inseparably” (Sheet 30, p. 8).

for this latter only exists for knowledge in so far as it is brought into a system of relations, that give it spatial and temporal, as well as conceptual determinateness” (Cassirer 1923, p. 284). In the *Disposition* from 1917, Cassirer is apparently building on this notion, which is already, at least in retrospect, reminiscent of the “symbolic pregnance” that Cassirer will first develop in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>70</sup> What is most striking in comparison, however, is the fact that this conjunction of representation with an “originally presentative function,” which to my knowledge is only mentioned in one place in *Substance and Function*, moves to the center of attention in the *Disposition* and is related to the mental in general: “This the secret of representational consciousness [*Vorstellungsbewusstsein*] as such, such that without this putative representation there is simply no presentation possible –” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 4). Thus, Cassirer is apparently no longer dealing primarily with consciousness as the medium of knowledge, but rather with “representational consciousness as such,” by which he is also referring to the phenomenological “theory of the intentional and of intentional acts.”<sup>71</sup> With the question of the “‘existence’ of the mental itself,” Cassirer’s focus apparently turns to the structure of experience as such, and thereby as a topic independent of the question of knowledge.

This thesis is confirmed by the subsequent “(Brief) analysis of time-consciousness” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 4).<sup>72</sup> That is to say, it builds on the concept of representation, but adds to it essential characterizations. Cassirer stands in opposition to an understanding of time as a form of intuition in Kant’s sense: “It is not that ‘the’ time is the form of inner sense; but this representative basic moment is simultaneously the precondition of ‘the’ time of ‘consciousness as such’.” The reason is that time-consciousness, like consciousness as such, is ultimately grounded in the function “by means of which the ‘element’ represents the totality of the series, the universal series-function R.” It is the “[c]ondition both of the consciousness of coexistence and of the consciousness of succession.” Here, Cassirer is apparently relying on concepts from his earlier epistemo-critical writing, and he sets them once again in opposition to the psychology of association, which is supposedly unable to explain the synthetic foundation

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**70** Cf. *ECW* 13, pp. 218–233, as well as the associated working notes, which have since been made accessible in *ECN* 4, pp. 3–84; for clarification, cf. Krois (1987, pp. 52–27) and Schwemmer (1997, pp. 69ff.).

**71** With respect to intentionality, Cassirer refers to “Literature, see: Brentano, *Psychology*; Up-hues; Husserl, *Logical Investigations*; Scholastic theory of the intentional” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 3).

**72** For the following citations, cf. *Disposition* 1917, pp. 4f.



of consciousness that Cassirer now understands as a “series-function.”<sup>73</sup> The subsequent description, however, already goes decidedly beyond the conceptualization of representation that is familiar from the epistemo-critical work in terms of its approach. The reason is that Cassirer now understands the relationship between the whole and the individual that is essentially characteristic of representation as a temporal relationship, which is only as such descriptive of the mind and of experience: “Representation of the not-now in the now; This the secret of representational consciousness [*Vorstellungsbewusstsein*] as such, such that without this putative representation there is simply no presentation possible –” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 4). Furthermore, he explains, these temporal relationships are directional and imply various temporal horizons. For one, the temporality of representation is involved with the past and memory: “time conditioned by the constantly vanishing and constantly self-preserving moment; This passing away and remaining conceived of as unified first constitutes the concept and the phenomenon of time” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 4). On the other hand, however, it is no less significant that time is directed towards the future by the mind and by experience, and to that extent likewise constantly involves anticipations: “But this ‘representative’ moment is not sufficient for the unity and for the phenomenon of consciousness as such, but rather it is now faced with another. ‘Consciousness’ does not only mean looking back, but also looking ahead; not only representation, but also anticipation. This is especially emphasized in will and impulse; but it is a fundamental character of ‘representation’ [*Vorstellung*] as such. Representation [*Vorstellung*] does not only mean the image of of something (= from something [*von etwas her*]), but rather direction to something (= towards something [*auf etwas hin*])” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 6). To support this claim phenomenally, Cassirer refers to the “representation of movement,” which he understands “as an integral moment of movement itself”: “The ‘represented’ [*vorgestellte*] movement is already a moment of the ‘executed’ movement; both intelligible only in and alongside one another.” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 7) The present of consciousness thus includes the horizons of the past and the future constitutively: “Considered again in the context of time: in the present, not only the past, but also the future is presented (= pre-formed in productive fantasy)” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 6).

These discussions of the temporality of consciousness rely on familiar concepts from *Substance and Function*, and furthermore they are, as so often in Cas-

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73 He thereby identifies this psychological function as a parallel to Kant’s argument against Hume’s critique of causality: without the assumption of an original conjunction, consequently, we would be unable in both cases to explain how one element could lead to another.

sirer, permeated by references to Kant, including, among others, references to the theory of the “synthesis of reproduction and recognition” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 3) or to the productive imagination. Cassirer’s discussions, therefore, go beyond that older epistemo-critical study less conceptually than descriptively, because they pursue an interest in the structures of experience that cannot be found in such a manner in the epistemo-critical writing.<sup>74</sup> While *Substance and Function* does brush up against similar questions, they are only hinted at in the margins of Cassirer’s argumentation.<sup>75</sup> The reason is that he was dealing at that point chiefly with the task of proving that the logical-conceptual development of what is thought is reflected in the highly structured operation of thinking. Concepts like existence, function, and series bear within themselves this older horizon, in which consciousness was primarily taken up as a sort of medium of knowledge. Now, however, these concepts are used by Cassirer to describe what lies on this side of the epistemo-critical horizon and the teleology of objectivization: the “‘existence’ of the mental itself,” within the temporality that is unique to it.

Consequently, the “psychology of the symbolic” no longer stands under the auspices of the strictly logical once it apprehends consciousness and its experience as genuinely temporal. The fact that these descriptions, however, could entail conceptual expansions in their own right can be seen in Cassirer’s close connection of anticipation with “will” and “drive,” which extend the theoretical aspect of knowledge to include a practical aspect of conscious life: “The ‘present’ of consciousness, its existence thus consists in an intertwining of these relationships to the past and to the future : – of (theoretical) ‘perceptions’ and (practical) tendencies towards movement. But ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ can still not at all be separated here in this primordial form of consciousness!” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 7). Cassirer does not elaborate on these descriptions. Nevertheless, these hints already document the fact that the structures of experience are no longer taken into consideration primarily in terms of their reference to

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<sup>74</sup> According to the very likely accurate assessment of Ernst Wolfgang Orth, this probably also holds true for the first writings on the philosophy of culture: “An original, philosophically systematic analysis of time first occurs in the third volume [of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, A.S.], which focuses on Cassirer’s philosophy of consciousness” (Orth 2004, p. 139). This fact confirms an impression that has been evoked on a number of occasions in the preceding pages: Cassirer’s notes on the “Psychology of the Symbolic” occasionally seem to anticipate the third volume from 1929, to such an extent that the development of Cassirer’s thought, according to the records, does not at all seem to take the same course as in the publications. Such a thesis, however, gives rise to methodological questions that cannot be discussed here.

<sup>75</sup> However, cf. Cassirer (1923), pp. 266–268), where Cassirer finally deals with the historical development and the progress of science itself.

knowledge, but are rather related to forms of consciousness on this side of knowledge.

Nonetheless, the analysis of “[r]epresentation as a mentally constitutive basic element,” as well as the temporality that belongs to it, leaves unmentioned over the course of several pages, all of which omit the keywords concerning the “Psychology of the Symbolic,” the entanglement of the “inner” and the “outer” in the register of the symbolic. As such, this “analysis of time-consciousness” could also momentarily give rise to the erroneous impression that Cassirer, like Husserl, was dealing with a *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, intended primarily to justify the possibility of an intentional experience of the world.<sup>76</sup> On the contrary, Cassirer’s analysis marches under the banner of the symbolic, and it therefore points in the opposite direction. Thus, it is not merely the case that this analysis must be supplemented by an additional step, as Cassirer’s subsequent remark suggests: “Only after this can it be discussed: the symbolic function as a ‘transition’ from ‘inner’ to ‘outer’ (hitherto discussed purely in the context of the ‘inner’)” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 8). Rather, Cassirer cautions himself on the last page focusing on his keywords of the “Psychology of the Symbolic” to develop “more precisely” the entanglement of “inner” and “outer” from the very beginning: “every function of expression is already something internal-external – does not merely ‘signify’ one such” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 8). Cassirer’s analysis of the representative and temporal dimension of consciousness, consequently, stands from the very beginning under the presupposition of the “symbolic function as a ‘transition’ from ‘inner’ to ‘outer.’”

“The symbolic” thus takes the place of the concept and in general inherits its task of establishing the correlation between the subjective process and the objective object of experience, in which context it is supposed to overcome the narrow limits of knowledge by reference to other forms of experience.<sup>77</sup> It is thus obvious that “the symbolic” will incorporate certain formal aspects of the logical-functional concept from the epistemo-critical writings. Cassirer characterizes it in this way with the help of concepts that, like “representation,” “series,” or “function,” were formulated in the context of *Substance and Function*.<sup>78</sup> In particular,

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76 Cf. Husserl (1991, especially pp. 4–10 and 25–28).

77 Just how closely the conception of the symbolic in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is connected with that of the scientific concept in *Substance and Function* is also demonstrated by Recki (2011a, in particular pp. 146–149 and 151–158). She primarily emphasizes the “continuity” (Recki 2011a, p. 141) of the “extension of the concept of the concept to the concept of the symbol, throughout which the focus on the *functional determination* of the constitution of reality does not change” (Recki 2011a, p. 151).

78 On that subject, cf. also Lofts (2000, pp. 35–42).

the “symbolic function” is closely linked with the entanglement between element and whole that had characterized the representation of knowledge and was also already identified in this context as “symbolic meaning” (Cassirer 1923, p. 247).<sup>79</sup> In fact, the concept of the symbolic carries this basic theme from Cassirer's holistic theory of meaning further. All moments of continuity aside, however, the introduction of the symbolic simultaneously illustrates a decisive discontinuity. The concept of the symbolic has the peculiar benefit of being sufficiently undetermined to include other forms of experience beyond knowledge and to comprehend knowledge as one of its own specifications. Cassirer's philosophy thus opens up to itself experiences on this side of knowledge, which are able to model prior conditions of knowledge or to develop autonomous forms of experience that remain independent of the question of knowledge. Cassirer's analysis of the representation and temporality of consciousness thus brings about a new emphasis, because it describes the inherent structures of experience in great detail without relating these from the very beginning to the *telos* of knowledge.

## The Impulse towards Systematic Expansion: Cassirer's History of Aesthetics

The systematic opening up of Cassirer's philosophy was by no means without cause. Rather, many factors attest to the fact that *Freedom and Form* from 1916 provided an essential impulse.<sup>80</sup> The reason is that this study in the history of ideas at least indirectly opens up, with the help of the history of the development of aesthetics, among other themes, a field of phenomena that seems largely for-

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**79** “It is only by conceiving all phenomena as connected by necessary relations, that we can use any individual phase as a representation and symbol of the total process and of its universal rules. It is this symbolic meaning, which every inductive inference claims for itself; the particular determination offered by the sensuous impression becomes a norm, that has to be retained as a permanent feature in the intellectual structure of empirical reality” (Cassirer 1923, p. 247). Similarly, by means of knowledge, “the particular given impression ... becomes a symbol of a thorough-going systematic organization, within which it stands and to a certain extent participates” (Cassirer 1923, p. 281). And yet again a similar passage: “Each particular member of experience possesses a symbolic character, in so far as the law of the whole, which includes a totality of members, is posited and intended in it. The particular appears as a differential, that is not fully determined and intelligible without reference to its integral” (Cassirer 1923, p. 300).

**80** On the following, cf. Fabien Capeillères' extraordinarily worthwhile afterword to Cassirer's *Écrits sur l'art*, in particular Capeillères (1995, pp. 205f.), as well as, primarily with an eye to the role of Goethe, Skidelsky (2008, pp. 76–78).

eign to Cassirer's epistemo-critical works, and which therefore necessitated a systematic expansion. Cassirer's historical study thereby continues to operate conceptually largely within the intellectual horizon of *Substance and Function*. On the one hand, the titular relationship between freedom and form already traces the existence of the subject back to its spontaneous activity, but, on the other hand, that existence is simultaneously mediated by the objective existence of its products and, as it were, anchored in them. Consequently, freedom does not simply presuppose that an "inner" that can count as free must also in principle "externalize" itself. Rather, freedom is defined by the fact that an "inner" obtains its existence in an "outer" that it itself creates and to which it is bound: "the opposition of 'outer' and 'inner' is dissolved into a pure correlation" (*ECW* 7, p. 92). Systematically, *Freedom and Form* – in spite of its stronger emphasis on subjective spontaneity and its completely different subject matter in the history of ideas – continues to speak the same language as *Substance and Function*: "The schematic opposition between the merely internal and the merely external is thereby annulled. Everything merely 'subjective,' that which is determined in pure inwardness, attains the certainty of its own existence only to the extent that it objectivizes this existence and, as it were, arises out of itself" (*ECW* 7, pp. 132f.).

The implementation of this fundamental idea, however, ventures a decisive step beyond the epistemo-critical writings, because Cassirer's "Studies on German Intellectual History," as is the subtitle of *Freedom and Form*, do not limit themselves to the "problem of knowledge."<sup>81</sup> These studies include in their account various fields of culture in order to prove that the understanding of freedom on which they focus is "one of the most universal themes of intellectual history in the German tradition." At the most general level, this view involves returning to a free and productive subjectivity in order to comprehend it as "the bearer of a new, authentically objective content."<sup>82</sup> Cassirer discusses this

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**81** However, this opening up of the subject matter is, as must be clarified at this point, by no means completely foreign to the first two volumes of *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age* from 1906 and 1907, because Cassirer discusses the question of knowledge again and again in the broader contexts of culture. By way of example, cf. the chapter on Montaigne in *ECW* 2, pp. 143ff.

**82** Cited in context: "In Lessing's doctrine of genius, in turn, there is developed one of the most universal themes of intellectual history in the German tradition. The approach returns from the work itself to the origin of the work and to its 'foreman.' Once again, we thereby seem to have been led back to the heart of pure subjectivity: but once again this subjectivity proves itself to be the bearer of a new, authentically objective content. The turn to the subject is thus, in Lessing, anything but the turn to any form of 'subjectivism'; for what drives him to return from the 'outer' to the 'inner'; the grounding of 'fate' in 'character,' of the rule in genius, is his demand for a

theme in fields as diverse as that of philosophy from Leibniz to German Idealism,<sup>83</sup> literature from Lessing, through Goethe, and up to Schiller,<sup>84</sup> and the theory of the state from the late middle ages up to Hegel.<sup>85</sup> The concepts of the “inner” and “outer,” as well as that of the spontaneous act that mediates them, thereby undergo various concretizations that range far beyond knowledge: from Leibniz’ expression of an individually determined substance within concrete phenomena or his ontological definition of the relationship between lived body and mind;<sup>86</sup> through Kant’s conception of the objectivity of the object of cognition as an expression of the necessity of mental conjunctions and the binding of the free will by the form of self-imposed law in practical philosophy;<sup>87</sup> up through Herder’s conception of a spoken and symbolized expression, which determines both the sensation and its object,<sup>88</sup> or Goethe’s understanding of the “form of his life, [...] the form of his poetry, and [...] the form of his view of nature and his objective research into nature,” in which his creativity is expressed objectively and in this way reflects on itself.<sup>89</sup>

Quite a wide variety of phenomena are thus explored in Cassirer’s study in the history of ideas in accordance with a heuristic inspired by *Substance and Function*. Religion, philosophy, literature, and political thought – which, as an aside, are also described as “series” entirely in the style of *Substance and Function*<sup>90</sup> – are supposed to be considered in terms of the specific ways in which

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consistent determinacy in events and in creativity, a determinacy from which every mere whim and accident has been removed. Here too, the conventional form is destroyed in order to allow the real and deeper form to emerge, the form which is grounded in freedom” (*ECW* 7, pp. 110f.).

**83** With reference to Leibniz, cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 42 and 52f.; by way of Kant, cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 159 and 170f.; and with respect to Fichte, cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 357–359.

**84** With respect to Lessing, cf. *ECW* 7, p. 109; with reference to Goethe, cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 195 and 199; and on Schiller, cf. *ECW* 7, p. 306.

**85** Cf. the whole of the last chapter, “The Idea of Freedom and the Idea of the State,” in *ECW* 7, pp. 319ff.

**86** Cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 53 and 86f.

**87** Cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 159f., 170f., and 176.

**88** Cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 132–135.

**89** Cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 185f.

**90** “Because here we are not dealing with the implementation of an abstract proposition from the history of philosophy, which is supposed to be put to the test only subsequently by the particular facts, but rather with the concrete intuition of these facts themselves and their intellectual context. How the fundamental themes that come to the fore in the history of religion in Germany and in the history of German philosophy, in the history of German poetry and in thought on the state, themes which first appear to be operative purely in isolation, are connected to one another – whether we ought to assume any sort of overarching unity among them or whether each member of these series stands on its own and has to be comprehended solely on its

each unfolds independently, and simultaneously are supposed to make up the more or less coherent context of a “history of ideas in the German tradition.” Cassirer dedicates a brief methodological discussion in the “Introduction” to *Freedom and Form* to the challenge of describing a unified historical development and simultaneously preserving the diversity of the fields under consideration. According to Cassirer, the two titular concepts form, as it were, an intermediate level that is supposed to allow the various fields of culture to be intertwined with one another and simultaneously to highlight their respective specific traits: “Through these categories [of freedom and form, A.S.], we are supposed to determine, as it were, a mutually intersecting plane, on which the religious, the philosophical, the literary development has been projected uniformly, in order by those means to allow what is specific in their peculiar laws to emerge just as much as the universal context in which they stand” (*ECW* 7, p. 390). Cassirer, however, goes yet a step further when he, in this interplay between the universal history of ideas and the development of specific fields, does not merely point to one methodological problem in historiography, but rather an essential moment of flux in history itself. The fact that every field of culture obeys its own laws does not, according to Cassirer, lead to any detached autarchy or one-sided dominance of any individual field. Rather, this fact carries out the historical unfolding of the “relative unity of that totality that we describe as modern intellectual culture,” because every field of culture exercises its autonomy within the framework of culture and thereby contributes to the formation of cultural unity in its diversity.<sup>91</sup> Cassirer sees in this development a characteristic of modernity and thereby associates himself with popular theories of differentiation, in that he,

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own terms: this is the problem that was primarily at issue here” (*ECW* 7, p. 390). Cf. a parallel passage with respect to scientific development in Cassirer (1923, pp. 266–268).

<sup>91</sup> “Because precisely this is the law under which historical development stands, that the notion of the autonomy of the intellectual, provided that this notion is included therein at all, can at first only operate and come into being within a single determinate and restricted circle. When an individual sphere, such as that of the religious, rises up to the consciousness of its independence, it simultaneously avails itself of an all-encompassing and absolute validity, but thereby simply excludes everything that lies outside of itself from this process of self-liberation. Consequently, every positive determination simultaneously includes within itself a negative in this real historical development; every separation simultaneously expresses itself as a new binding. Only when the basic requirement for autonomy once again establishes itself in its totality from out of this restriction, when it has been newly situated and fought for within every particular region, does the relative unity of that totality that we describe as modern intellectual culture arise out of the opposition of these movements. This work attempts to show in detail how this struggle is expressed and reflected in the history of ideas in the German tradition, how the forces that are operative within this struggle are here recognized piece by piece and raised to a clear consciousness of themselves” (*ECW* 7, pp. 392f.).

like them, accepts an all-too-simplistic idea of the hierarchical worldview and social structures of the middle ages.

It is, however, of great significance for the train of thought that is pursued here just how Cassirer justifies the “categories” of freedom and form methodologically. In depicting various developments in religion, philosophy, literature, and political thought, they are supposed to allow for the simultaneous emergence of “what is specific in their peculiar laws” and “the universal context in which they stand.”<sup>92</sup> The introduction of the symbolic in the *Disposition* from 1917 pursues a similar goal, systematically speaking. That is, “the symbolic” also functions as such a “category,” which first and foremost has the goal of relating the various fields of culture on the far side of knowledge to their universal and common conditions, while nevertheless simultaneously preserving their irreducible specificity in each case. As such, the concept of the symbolic perhaps seemed to Cassirer to be quite suitable, because it is relatively undetermined and can thus incorporate diverse phenomena without reducing what is specific in them to common structures.

Consequently, the concept of the symbolic represents a conceptual answer to the methodological challenges entailed by Cassirer's *Freedom and Form*, which are largely a result of its abundance of material. If the phenomena into which this historical study delves were also to be included systematically in Cassirer's philosophy, then it was inevitable that the epistemo-critical primacy of the scientific concept would first be called into question. Thus arises the question of how the epistemological, aesthetic-literary, and ethical-religious phenomena under consideration should be apprehended both in their diversity and in their shared context, as well as in terms of what is specific in each case and their common characteristics. It is probably this methodological challenge that allows Cassirer to seek after new, more comprehensive conceptions in departure from familiar concepts and for him to rely on the initially quite undetermined category of the symbolic, which nevertheless is quite amenable to specification and conducive to heuristics.

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<sup>92</sup> As is made clear in the first chapter of the volume, Leibniz – as is often the case in Cassirer – can certainly stand as the godfather for this approach: “Conversely, Leibniz, in his outline of the ‘scientia generalis,’ which accompanies his philosophy from beginning to end, gives proof to the notion that is unique and essential to his system. This universal that he seeks is not meant to cause the particular to disappear, but rather to preserve and justify it in its independent significance. The unity of knowledge demands to be unfolded in an abundance and multiplicity of scientific forms, each one of which is governed by a specific law” (*ECW* 7, p. 26). On this relationship, cf. Ferrari (2003, pp. 163–182). Certainly, Kant appears with a similar perspective; cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 152 and 160, to which I will return in the second chapter.



With an eye to the first *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” therefore, the observations from Ernst Wolfgang Orth’s still relevant essay on the operative use of concepts in Cassirer’s philosophy of culture can only be confirmed. That is, as Orth proves in the context of the published writings, the concept of the symbolic is not primarily or predominantly the object of philosophical reflection. Rather, it functions in quite a surgical fashion and corresponds to the “factual requirements” that are being pursued: “This philosophy wants both to respect the diversity of cultural manifestations, in which a wide variety of sciences play a large role, and also to make intelligible the meaning of cultural unity” (Orth 1988, p. 48). It is the operational concept of the symbolic that is supposed to account for this undertaking and thereby to draw out conceptual consequences from *Freedom and Form*. The historical study had not merely, on the basis of its wealth of material, directed Cassirer’s attention towards new and different phenomena. It had also necessitated a revision of the foundations of Cassirer’s philosophy, whose new, broader horizon is provisionally outlined by the concept of the symbolic, which was thematized only rarely and which remained rather vague.

## The “Logic of the Symbolic”: The Specific Form of the Logical Concept

In the preceding sections, I demonstrated how Cassirer generalizes the main features of his theory of the scientific concept in conceiving of the symbolic. The concept served as a model for the symbolic and, in consequence, is found once again to be one form of symbolization among others.<sup>93</sup> The keywords concerning the “Logic of the Symbolic” thus introduce a sequence of sections that are intended to characterize concrete specifications of the symbolic under the assumption of a universal concept of the symbol that is itself hardly thematized. Obviously, in so doing, Cassirer chooses certain fields that, for one thing, are familiar to him from his earlier works and which therefore, for another, can be dealt with experimentally on the fresh horizon of the new project without additional preparation: on the one hand, the theory of the scientific concept and the

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<sup>93</sup> A good ten years later, Cassirer will refer to this close relationship of the symbolic to the concept explicitly: the concept, as Cassirer claims in answer to a criticism of his theory of the concept, proved to be a part of the broader “general *problem of significance*” in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, but also, as a “particular province within the region of theoretical significance,” the “‘exact’ concepts” assume the decisive role of the “paradigm” for the comprehensive “whole of meaning as such”; cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 83–91, here p. 84.

analysis of the exact sciences from *Substance and Function* are taken into consideration once again in the context of the project of a philosophy of the symbolic; on the other hand, aesthetics and the arts, to which *Freedom and Form* had already been dedicated in a historical context, are now discussed anew from a systematic perspective as concrete forms of the symbolic. Thus, after the section on the “Logic of the Symbolic” and brief headlines concerning the “system of exact sciences” as well as the “General Doctrine of Knowledge,” there follows a section on aesthetics and the arts.

In the sections headlined by the “Logic of the Symbolic,” Cassirer endeavors first and foremost to clarify the status of this “logic.” As such, he differentiates it from “symbolic logic” right at the beginning of the section: we are not dealing here with a mathematical logic and its use of signs, but rather with a philosophical doctrine of the concept, which the former already has to presuppose. This distinction is bound up, as is hardly surprising, with an understanding of logic that, for Cassirer as well as his teachers, is oriented on the “transcendental logic” in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and which focuses on the correlation between knowing and the known.<sup>94</sup> Cassirer’s real point, however, is that this correlation is ultimately no longer guaranteed, as Kant and his own epistemo-critical writings assumed, by the function of the concept, but should rather be understood first and foremost as an accomplishment of the symbolic. According to Cassirer, the task is to recognize “the ‘symbolic’ moment as a constituent of the logical itself, therefore as a moment of the concept-function itself as such!” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 10).<sup>95</sup> Put differently, with the “Logic of the Symbolic,” we are dealing with a theory of the scientific concept that conceives of it by beginning with the symbolic. Cassirer thus observes parenthetically: “Precisely analogous to the case of the psychological earlier: not the role of the symbolic in mental life, but rather as a condition of the ‘mental,’ as a defining moment thereof – likewise not the symbolic, its use and its fruitfulness in logic, but rather as fundamental for the problem and task of logic itself.”

Consequently, the task at hand is, for one thing, to demonstrate that the scientific concept has its universal condition in the symbolic, and, for another, to detail how the logical concept should be characterized as one specific form of symbolization. Cassirer begins the first task by relying on the conception of representation that he had originally developed in the context of the mathematical concept. He elucidates this notion of representation under the subheading “a) The Problem of the Concept,” thus by reference to the renowned “constitutive

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94 Cf. *CPR*, A 57/B 81f. and Cassirer (1981, pp. 171–174).

95 For the following citations, cf. also *Disposition 1917*, pp. 10f.

series-function, the epitome of the relationship between member and member,” without forgetting the reference to his decisive epistemo-critical writing that is contemporary with this passage: “General Theory of the Concept (cf. Substance and Function!).” As such, the concept grounds representations as before – but now Cassirer understands representation as an accomplishment of the symbolic and as a characteristic of the mental in general, a shift that he had carried out in the preceding section of the *Disposition*. Therefore, the concept, especially in its familiar function of grounding representations, must now prove to be contingent on a symbolics that assumes responsibility for representation in general. This argumentation is essentially based on a systematic interpretation of the development of the conception of the symbolic from that of the concept: because Cassirer conceives of the symbolic as a generalization of the concept, the concept must be understood as one form of the symbolic.<sup>96</sup>

It proves to be a greater challenge, not only to understand the concept in logic as a form of representation or of the symbolic as such, but to characterize it concretely as one of their specific forms. This task is, in turn, a systematic consequence of the introduction of the symbolic, but it must be understood simultaneously as an expression of a changed perspective on the concept. In *Substance and Function*, Cassirer had sought over and over again to demonstrate, in the various scientific disciplines, the fact *that* the central concepts of each should be understood as series-concepts and function-concepts, but without taking any interest in their specific differences.<sup>97</sup> In the “Logic of the Symbolic,” in contrast, the logical concept itself appears as one form of symbolization alongside others. Moreover, Cassirer elaborates on *how* different concepts are structured, although in principle in the same way, according to different relations. Be-

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**96** For the characterization of representation with a view to “logic,” Cassirer introduces an additional concept, one that is traditionally bound up with the concept of representation, but also with the meaning of the symbolic: the sign. In so doing, Cassirer attaches the greatest importance to the fact that, with the concept of the sign, we are not dealing with a mere description of something that is given independently of the sign, which was previously his reply to Leibniz and Lambert: “Even Leibniz’ outline of universal characteristic or Lambert’s semiotics do not seem to go beyond this point. Both are outlines for a sign language, once the concepts are already given, are known by other means” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 9). In contrast, Cassirer demands: “the objectifying function and significance of the ‘sign’ must be recognized!” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 11). I will leave out this new aspect here in order to lay out this train of thought in an orderly manner.

**97** It thus seems to me to be quite dubious to speak of a “systematic program” in light of *Substance and Function* (Kreis 2009, p. 110). Kreis’ portrayal gives such an impression primarily since he understands the earlier epistemo-critical work retrospectively as “part of the system of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*” (Kreis 2009, p. 98).

cause the “‘series-principle’ on which the concept is based can, in and for itself, be of a variety of types,” the specific differences between various concepts come to the fore (*Disposition 1917*, p. 12).<sup>98</sup> Under the subheading “(b) The Logic of Subsumption,” Cassirer lists as examples, among others, “thing-concepts and act-concepts, object-concepts and number concepts” in order to emphasize the “specific law of construction” peculiar to each case: thus, thing-concepts arise from the “substance-category” (something has a property), number-concepts from the “category of ordering” (something follows something else). Cassirer concludes: “The groups of concepts that have arisen in this way are thus initially disparate, ‘heterogeneous.’” This in-principle “heterogeneity” of concepts opens up a new perspective in comparison with Cassirer’s epistemo-critical theory, a perspective that does not solely focus on the function of the scientific concept as such, but rather on its specific, diverse forms.

This “heterogeneity” of concepts now forms the backdrop against which the specific operation of logical concepts can be characterized. Namely, as Cassirer demonstrates with an eye to simple examples taken from everyday life like counting, in which a wide variety of things have to be related to one another, formal logic renders concepts comparable by relating them to “an originary homogeneity” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 14).<sup>99</sup> Logic makes use of the “intuition of space”<sup>100</sup> in order to reduce all concepts to their mere extension: “This explains the fact that, of the concepts – setting aside all the diversity of their ‘origin,’ their ‘significance’ and their productive point of view (producing category) – only their extent (thus, their pure size ratio) is retained” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 14).<sup>101</sup> Cassirer

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<sup>98</sup> For the following citations, cf. *Disposition 1917*, pp. 12–14.

<sup>99</sup> “But because we are constantly dealing with their reciprocal relationship (because, e.g., ‘things’ – are ‘counted,’ thus thing-concepts and number-concepts are related to one another synthetically), there thus arises the requirement for logic to overcome this heterogeneity by our relating it to an originary homogeneity” (*Disposition 1917*, pp. 13f.).

<sup>100</sup> Cassirer’s argumentation seems quite tentative regarding the nature of this space. On the one hand, he distinguishes it, as “metric space,” from “qualitatively differentiated ‘psychological’ space” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 14), but on the other hand he limits this metric space to “the greater and lesser, being-inside- and being-outside-one-another as such” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 15), a point which leaves aside all the more precise relations that distinguish a metrics and which instead ultimately seems to amount to set-theoretic relations. Cassirer’s statements here remain conspicuously imprecise in this respect.

<sup>101</sup> This account naturally presupposes that the “conceptual form” and the “spatial form” are different and specific forms, and it thereby already goes beyond *Substance and Function*. There, in contrast, Cassirer had concluded from the relational nature of space – seen in retrospect, in the absence of any differentiations at that time – that space too has a logical-conceptual structure. In the *Disposition* from 1917, on the contrary, he can contrast space, in its relational nature,

thus attributes to formal logic the capacity to produce a “‘homogeneity’ of concepts,” without which even the simplest acts of counting would not be explicable (*Disposition 1917*, p. 15).

This capacity of formal logic could seem problematic in light of Cassirer’s new emphasis on the different “form of the specific law of attribution [*Zuordnung*]” of concepts. However, for Cassirer, the point is not to criticize the reduction of heterogeneous concepts to extensions that are comparable in principle, for example, as a problematic abstraction. Rather, what matters to him is to apprehend formal logic itself by means of its specific formal law and thereby consistently to implement the notion of specifying concepts concretely. Consequently, Cassirer understands abstraction from the specific generation of concepts simply as the specific “form” of formal logic and the concepts that are peculiar to it: “The so-called ‘formal’ logic comes to a halt at this mere moment of abstraction: its ‘form’ consists simply in the fact that it abstracts from the specific form of concepts (just as number does not take charge of what is ‘numbered’)” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 15).

This description allows the new perspective on the “Logic of the Symbolic” to emerge clearly: first, on the basis of the theory of the concept from *Substance and Function*, Cassirer accentuates the concrete diversity of concepts; secondly, he thereby focuses on their respective “specific form,” which is grounded in the development of concepts by way of various “series-principles” and “productive relations”; thirdly, he describes formal logic itself as one “form” that is characterized specifically by abstraction from the specific form of concepts in favor of considering their mere extent. It is this form of logic that Cassirer now goes beyond merely identifying explicitly as symbolic: “Logic thus achieves the ‘homogeneity’ of concepts by means of a symbolic representation of all conceptual relations in pure spatial relations” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 15).<sup>102</sup> Cassirer understands logic as a “particular application of the symbolic (which comes about via the relationship of the ‘conceptual form’ to the ‘spatial form,’ thus by means of one specific attribution).” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 17) Such a “depiction” may operate

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with the form of the scientific concept, because there are different relations producing space and concept and grounding their heterogeneity. I will discuss this aspect in more detail later.

**102** Probably with respect to the specific differences of concepts and their reduction to comparable extensions, Cassirer also characterizes this “symbolic depiction” as “merely symbolic”: “The spatial picture is the completely sufficient symbol for all relations under consideration here, but it is of course a mere-symbol!” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 16).

on a “higher” level than the specific forms of concepts from which it abstracts.<sup>103</sup> However, it itself turns out to be one specific form that consists in the reduction of specific concepts to their extension.

Thus, Cassirer’s new interest in the various specifications of the symbolic also refines his sense for the specific characteristics of concepts, and in the sections headlined by the “Logic of the Symbolic” it is bound up with the language of “form,” taking up earlier formulations, albeit often rather incidental ones. That word certainly does not play any fixed terminological role in *Substance and Function*, although Cassirer occasionally speaks of the “series-form” when referring to the universal structural conditions of knowledge and the known.<sup>104</sup> From a similar systematic perspective, we find constructions like “form-concepts”<sup>105</sup> or “conceptual form”<sup>106</sup> that borrow from Kant’s concept of form.<sup>107</sup> In *Freedom and Form*, these constructions proliferate tremendously, but they also undergo an expansion in terms of content. That is, they now designate, in a wide variety of fields of culture, and just as ubiquitously as imprecisely, all possible formal determinations of something that is determined by them or determines itself through them. The autonomously adopted law in Kant’s practical philosophy is thus understood as a “form of the will,” while nature in the sense of appearance is understood in his theoretical philosophy as a “form of the object”; the person of Goethe, in contrast, unites a “form of artistic composition” with a “new form of intellectual existence as such,” while a “people [Volk]” is, according to the political thought of German Idealism, supposed to rediscover itself in the “form of the state.”<sup>108</sup> Thus, in *Freedom and Form*, Cassirer uses the form-concept to designate a wide variety of possibilities of meaning-formation, in which a spontaneous process of formation expresses and reflects on itself in a specific way in the form of a product. What it seemed, in the epis-

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**103** “What forces itself upon us here is the general observation that the symbolic function can confront us in a wide variety of phases (and, so to speak, at various ‘altitudes’)” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 17).

**104** Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 25f., as well as, on the “system-form,” pp. 40f.).

**105** “The attempt to portray the whole of knowledge in systematic unity culminates in ultimate *form-concepts*, which bring to expression the possible modes of relation among contents as such” (*ECW 9*, p. 151).

**106** “[...] for precisely here lies the real problem – that mathematics is no ‘logical unique,’ but that it progressively provides the ‘special’ natural sciences with its own characteristic [conceptual form]” (Cassirer 1923, p. 230, n. 86).

**107** Thus, in *Kant’s Life and Thought*, Cassirer speaks of the “transcendental concept of form,” referring thereby to the “forms” of pure intuition” as well as to the “forms” of pure understanding” (Cassirer 1981, p. 239).

**108** Cf. these illustrative formulations in *ECW 7*, pp. 166, 175, 184, and 377.

temo-critical writings, that only the concept was capable of accomplishing is now entrusted on various levels to diverse, specific forms. The concept of the form thereby underwent an expansion that simultaneously connected it to the concrete diversity of existing forms.

Following this linguistic and conceptual development is the *Disposition* from 1917. As the citations above prove, Cassirer uses the concept of form in the “Logic of the Symbolic” to describe the diversity of specific concepts, and in particular to characterize the logical concept as a form that abstracts from the various forms of concepts. However, Cassirer does not merely understand as forms the various concepts, but rather also a wide variety of specifications of the symbolic, the “symbolic forms” and “symbol-forms” on the far side of knowledge.<sup>109</sup> The language of form thus permeates the whole “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” because the universal concept of the symbolic is connected from the very beginning with its necessary specification for and into various fields of symbolization.

## Particularizations of the Concept: The Demand of Richard Höningwald

The keywords in “II) The Logic of the Symbolic” and in the subsequent sections “III) The Number Function (N)” and “IV) General Doctrine of Knowledge” are limited to epistemology and unfold the specification of the symbolic primarily by reference to the “specific form of concepts” in the sciences. This approach should be understood as a systematic consequence of accepting a universal concept of the symbolic and its necessary specification for the forms of symbolization to the point of their individual differentiation. At the same time, however, it can be comprehended as a reaction to a critique of Cassirer’s theory of the concept. Namely, Richard Höningwald’s review from 1912 was not merely a positive evaluation of *Substance and Function*, but rather raised several pointed objections as well.<sup>110</sup>

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**109** For examples of “symbolic form,” cf. Sheet 10, p. 1, or Sheet 15, pp. 2f., as well as on “symbol-form,” Sheet 8, p. 5, Sheet 18, p. 7, or Sheet 24, p. 3. Cassirer uses both terms synonymously.

**110** Cf. Höningwald 1912a. This debate has only rarely been appreciated in the secondary literature; cf. the rather brief mentions in Orth (2004, pp. 153 and 182), Kreis (2009, pp. 162 and 368), as well as Ferrari (2002, pp. 204–207). Höningwald’s review, and in particular his inquiry into the “particularization” of the concept, has largely been underrated in terms of its systematic significance for the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* up to the present day. For a general overview of the productive relationship between Höningwald and Cassirer, see Orth’s worthwhile essay in Orth (2004, pp. 253–277).

The focus of Höningwald's critique is Cassirer's attempt to understand the mathematical concept as a model for the formation of concepts as such and to view all scientific concepts as emerging therefrom. Höningwald is thus taking aim at the central premise of the epistemo-criticism of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, according to which the knowledge of the natural sciences should be considered in terms of a continuity with the mathematical-constructive process, and their concepts should be understood as "the extension and continuation of the *mathematical* concept" (Cassirer 1923, p. 146).<sup>111</sup> This critique, however, does not descend into a doctrinal dispute, because Höningwald does not just attempt to refute this position or simply oppose it with an alternative theory of the concept. On the contrary, he first concedes the general correctness of Cassirer's approach, so that he can then lay claim to specific differences that are grounded in the ways in which the concepts are applied, and which entail discontinuities from the mathematical concept.<sup>112</sup> Consequently, concepts in the natural sciences, unlike mathematical concepts, are not limited to the construction of their objects within a closed, ideal framework. First and foremost, they have to subsume what is to be comprehended and determine themselves in interaction therewith.<sup>113</sup> But even in the narrower field of mathematical concepts, Höningwald sees an underlying "arrangement according to idiosyncratic *material* points of view":<sup>114</sup> the concepts are specified in a way that depends on their objects, so that, e.g., the "geometry of position" has its own characteristic foundation in its concept of space.<sup>115</sup> According to Höningwald's central objection, it is one

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**111** This notion is ultimately constitutive for the first part of *Substance and Function*, and it therefore pervades the whole book; cf. also Cassirer (1923, pp. 20 f., 147–151, and 165 f.). Hermann Cohen's interpretation of the epistemological significance of infinitesimal calculus was of paramount importance for this notion; cf. Cohen (1883, pp. 125–134, in particular pp. 131 ff.).

**112** "As true as it is that natural science only 'continues an intellectual process already effective in mathematical knowledge,' it is just as true that the concept and the principle of such 'continuation' remain undetermined thereby. Here we encounter a hole in the argumentation, which can only be resolved by critically accentuating the *differing* relations between mathematics and natural science" (Höningwald 1912a, p. 2889).

**113** Cf. Höningwald (1912a, pp. 2886–2888, as well as, on the characterization of essential differences between concepts in mathematics and those in the natural sciences, pp. 2891–2893).

**114** Höningwald (1912a, p. 2894). Beyond that, Höningwald makes reference to historical concepts having to do with the "individual," which can, however, only be mentioned in passing here; cf. Höningwald (1912a, pp. 2893 f.).

**115** "It is the introduction of the specific, by the intuition of the senses as well as by the series-laws of number and by the connection, ascertained by judgment, of a similarly differentiated principle for the ordering of that which stands 'together,' which serves as the foundation for this mathematical discipline. That is, it is the function of an idiosyncratic *material* factor, which must be determined precisely in its structure and justified clearly in its claims to know-



thing “to investigate a given concept in pursuit of the conditions of the concept as such, and another thing entirely to investigate it in pursuit of the conditions of its own and particular function” (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2889).

Hönigswald thus begins in his review with the universal theory of the concept from *Substance and Function* in order to outline a whole spectrum of diverse forms of scientific concepts. The real point of his critique, however, is that he sees in Cassirer’s universal concept an implicit and incorrect generalization of *one* form of the mathematical concept, which seeks to level all specific differences: “In the spirit of these research activities [of the Marburg school, A.S.], Cassirer restricts the concept of amenability to thought to very specific particular forms of scientific thought, which are of course extremely significant in an epistemological context: he is everywhere inclined to identify the logical form of mathematical thought with the conditions of all scientific knowledge as such” (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2891). He responds to this questionable generalization with the demand for an “epistemology” that “everywhere remains aware that it must also engage with the fact and the problem of the *differentiation* of scientific concept-formation” (Hönigswald 1912a, pp. 2894f.). Only thus can the task that has been taken up by “criticism,” as Hönigswald portrays it, be successful: “to exhibit and justify the conditions of possible cognition as such in the multiplicity of the sciences” (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2822).

It is quite noteworthy that Cassirer reacts to this critique one year later in the omnibus review “Epistemology and the Limit Questions of Logic” [“Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik”].<sup>116</sup> His own review of an article by Hönigswald<sup>117</sup> largely limits itself to emphasizing the fact that the latter does not deny the unitary task of the concept, that of determining the object of knowledge, even if he does emphasize the diversity of scientific methods and thus relates the concept to a “material factor.”<sup>118</sup> First of all, Cassirer sees in this fact a softening of Hönigswald’s tone from that of his own earlier critique, because this factor is now understood as a modification of the concept and no longer refers to a material element of knowledge that is foreign to the concept.<sup>119</sup> In spite of this purported convergence, however, Cassirer attempts to defend his theory of the

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edge, that comes decisively to the fore here in the context of mathematics” (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2895).

**116** Cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 139–200.

**117** Cf. Hönigswald 2012b.

**118** Cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 155–159.

**119** Cf. Cassirer’s review of Hönigswald’s *Contributions to Epistemology and Methodology* [Beitraege zur Erkenntnistheorie und Methodenlehre] from 1906 in *Kant-Studien* 14 (1909), republished in *ECW* 9, pp. 447–459, in particular pp. 452–458.

concept against Höningwald's critique in a footnote. For this purpose, he first withdraws to the position that *Substance and Function* was only an attempt to account for the universal characteristics of the concept: "The unity of 'the' concept, i.e., of the concept-function as such, was intended to be highlighted and emphasized in contrast to all particularizations that this function undergoes subsequently through its application to determinate individual problems" (*ECW* 8, p. 158, n. 22). At the same time, however, he concedes the fact that these particularizations should have been discussed subsequently in greater detail: "The fact that, once the guiding principle had been attained, this principle allows for and *requires* further differences and determinations was not intended to be denied: concept-formation in mathematics and the natural sciences was regarded merely as the *paradigm* of the universal 'series-concept,' but not as an exhaustive expression of its operation and significance" (*ECW* 8, p. 158, n. 22). This passage hints at the claim that Cassirer would like to take his theory of the scientific concept as a point of departure and to differentiate it into the diversity of specific concepts. And Cassirer himself certainly seems to view this project as a meaningful undertaking in the concluding sentence of his footnote on Höningwald's critique: "To what extent the basic view of the concept that is described here proves itself beyond the limits of mathematics and physics, and what more precise determinations and modifications it undergoes in this context, can only be shown by implementing it within particular problem areas" (*ECW* 8, p. 158, n. 22). Cassirer can hardly grapple with this challenge in his omnibus review, however, and so he contents himself with scattered references to various disciplines.<sup>120</sup>

In the *Disposition* from 1917, in contrast, the "differentiation of scientific concept-formation" plays a major role (Höningwald 1912a, p. 2895). Cassirer now investigates concepts primarily with a view to their "specific form," and he apparently thereby takes ownership of Höningwald's demand. At the same time, however, he locates the differentiation of scientific concepts on the horizon of the systematic approach of his "Philosophy of the Symbolic" by viewing it as a continuation of the specification of the symbolic towards an internal differentiation of forms of symbolization. In this way, he is able both to unfold his theory of the concept further and to integrate it consistently into the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." Inspired by Höningwald's critique, however, Cassirer draws out an additional, complementary consequence: beginning with the heterogeneity of concepts and their specific geneses simultaneously means not being content with their indifferent juxtaposition, but rather demonstrating their systematic in-

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120 Cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 139f. and 155.

terconnection. In other words, the concepts of various disciplines must be ordered systematically, precisely because they differentiate themselves from one another. Cassirer braves this undertaking in the following section of the *Disposition* – and thereby seems to take into account once again a critique by Höningwald, who had maintained in his review of *Substance and Function* that “the tremendous methodological problem of a system of the sciences, to the extent that it means the problem of their multiplicity, [is, A.S.] foreign to the presuppositions of Cassirer’s work” (Höningwald 1912a, p. 2894). In contrast, this problem is just as little foreign to the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” as is the differentiation of scientific concepts: Cassirer now outlines a “system of exact sciences” – and thereby encounters problems that contribute to the task of rethinking the system of scientific concepts and the specification of the forms of the symbolic anew and conceiving of them more precisely (*Disposition* 1917, p. 18).

### The “System of Exact Sciences”: The Specification of Concepts

After Cassirer has worked out the specific form of logical concepts, he thus attempts to outline a “system of exact sciences.” In this task, as in his earlier epistemo-critical studies, he begins first and foremost with mathematics, in order to specify the fundamental concepts of various mathematical fields and simultaneously to sketch out their systematic unity. It is hardly surprising that these notes have little new to offer, at least in terms of content, since they are based on the first part of *Substance and Function* and rely almost exclusively on familiar material. Without expanding on these older analyses of scientific knowledge and the mathematical concept once again, which would be no less redundant for Cassirer than for the reader who is conversant with his writings, he refers back to them with the utmost brevity – not, however, merely in order to reiterate them, but rather to shift them into the new perspective of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”

The third section of the *Disposition* thus continues the preceding discussions: “For us, the development of the logical function as ἀπόδειξις is followed by III) The Number-Function (N) from which, in turn, emerges the whole system of exact sciences” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 18).<sup>121</sup> Consequently, Cassirer escalates his thesis that all knowledge depends on the function of the symbolic to the claim that the “exact sciences,” at least, “emerge” concretely from the “number-func-

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121 Cf. *Disposition* 1917, pp. 18–19 for the following citations as well.

tion”: the diversity of disciplines and their “whole system” are supposed to be conceivable by beginning with the mathematical concept of number. The fact that this concept is, to be sure, quite general, but nevertheless also a specific and particular concept, will certainly pose considerable problems for Cassirer in the near future.

This philosophical thesis is expressed in graphic form in the records. While Cassirer normally keeps his body text horizontal, he develops here, beginning with the subheading “Number-Function,” a diagrammatic depiction that ultimately extends over a two-page spread (see Fig. 3). The “system of exact sciences” thus unfolds into its diverse components by way of a “namely,” following which Cassirer cites first and foremost a certain conception of mathematics with “a) Concept of mathesis universalis as a science of order and measure,” a conception that has had a long-lasting impact since Descartes and which entails a restriction to quantities.<sup>122</sup> The description of this point of departure as “a),” to be sure, refers implicitly to other fields of mathematics. Their enumeration, however, is not pursued at this level of classification, and so it remains an open question which fields were supposed to be added here.

Instead, the “mathesis universalis” is subdivided by way of three lines into subsections that are supposed to “emerge” from the “number-function.” Cassirer invokes “a) Arithmetic” and “b) Algebra” and thereby distinguishes initially two tiers of number: the former defines numbers on the basis of a “fundamental function of ordering ( $\omega$ )” in “a symbolic expression of the first level ( $\sigma$ )” and makes use of the “‘numeral’ and ‘operational sign’”; algebra, “in a symbolic expression of the second level,” introduces the alphabetical symbols a, b, c and “general operational signs” in order to be able to carry out calculations irrespective of the concrete number in the equations, as in the binomial formula “ $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ ” that Cassirer gives as an example. In a third step, Cassirer adds “c) Analysis,” in which we are dealing with functions that map numbers to numbers. Cassirer notes: “The number-concept supplemented by the series-concept and function-concept; ‘Variable’ number.”

This enumeration gives rise to all sorts of detailed questions, which can probably be more or less clarified by recourse to *Substance and Function*. With a view to the *Disposition* with which we are concerned, however, the first thing that stands out is the fact that Cassirer only reluctantly makes use of the two-dimensional surface of the sheet. The three lines beginning from “order and

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122 Cf. the characterization of the “mathesis universalis” in the fourth rule of Descartes’ *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*.

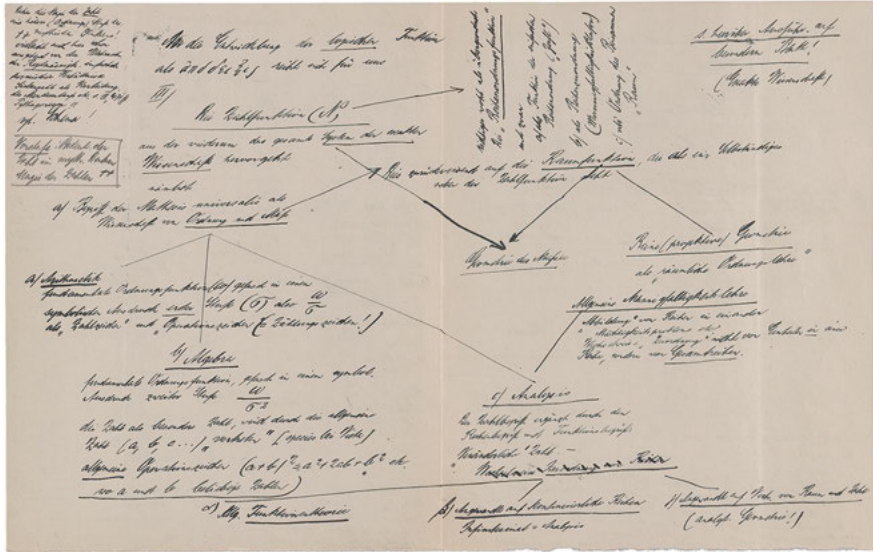


Fig. 3: Pages 18/19 of Cassirer’s *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”

measure” seem to envisage three bullet points alongside one another, and in fact subpoint a) is also shifted slightly to the left of the text. The ensuing explanations, however, nearly proceed to fill up the whole width of the page, to the point that Cassirer lengthened the middle, vertical line so that the second keyword “Algebra” comes to be written below, a bit closer to center. Only the third line opens up the whole width of the larger sheet for the sequence of “a) Arithmetic,” “b) Algebra,” and “c) Analysis,” because it has to go farther out as a result of the page having already been covered in writing, thus moving over to the right-hand page of the larger folded sheet.

The order in which this diagram was drawn can hardly be reconstructed precisely or with certainty. Nevertheless, the way in which it is laid out on the sheet and the economy of the limited surface area that it uses suggest that Cassirer developed it, as it were, as the text depicts. Additional moves, however, wade deeper into uncertainties, a point which is just as applicable to Cassirer’s diagram as to the “system of exact sciences” that is supposed to emerge from number. It is quite probable that Cassirer initially wanted to develop the point on analysis further. Because it is concerned with functions, it is connected to a “General Theory of Functions.” Given that functions carry out an “alternate attribution of series,” a line which was crossed out by Cassirer himself, they can be applied to “continuous series” or to the “relation between space and number,” which give rise to “infinitesimal analysis” and “analytic geometry.” By this point at the latest, how-

ever, Cassirer runs into a problem. That is, geometry presupposes the concept of space that, together with its own peculiar characteristics, is made possible by a “specific productive act.” Consequently, it cannot be derived from number and presupposed at this point in Cassirer’s diagram.

Apparently, Cassirer drew out two consequences from his diagram. First, he abandoned the last step in the deduction by crossing out its point of departure, the “attribution of series.” And secondly, he introduced space as an additional presupposition of the “system of exact sciences,” because he considers it to be heterogeneous with respect to number and therefore cannot presume it as given alongside the latter. The *mathesis universalis*, as a “science of order and measure,” has to presuppose space as well. Cassirer draws an upward arrow to “spatial function,” the introduction of which, however, he simultaneously explains and justifies: “This pointing back to the spatial function, which stands as something independent alongside the number-function.” Cassirer also does not miss the chance to derive “Pure (Projective) Geometry” immediately from space and the “Geometry of Measure” from its combination with number. Increasingly, however, a certain disorder now prevails among the arrows, which sometimes refer back to their presuppositions, but which at other times point to derived notions, and which overall hardly give evidence of a system. Cassirer’s assumption of the primacy of the “number-function,” which is perhaps a result of his striving for a system, and the introduction of the “spatial function” that arises during the diagrammatical construction of the system trample over the ordering on the sheet almost literally. The diagram, with its branching structure, was from the beginning an attempt to derive the “system of exact sciences” from a unitary principle, but at the same time its consequences ultimately make it necessary to introduce new and additional presuppositions. The result to which this fact clearly points is this: not even the fields of mathematics emerge from the number-function alone.

The disorder of the diagram thus takes the place of the system that Cassirer was seeking, a disorder which is also demonstrated elsewhere by the fact that the significance of the connecting lines becomes increasingly unclear. Thus, Cassirer connected to analysis a “General Theory of Manifolds,” in which context he is referring to the groundbreaking works of Georg Cantor and the development of set theory.<sup>123</sup> This theory appears to be understood here as a consequence of “analysis,” since Cassirer introduces it by way of the question of the cardinality

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**123** As in *Substance and Function*, pp. 62–67, what is meant here is Georg Cantor’s *Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds* (i.e., his *Grundlagen einer allgemeinen Mannigfaltigkeitslehre. Ein mathematisch-philosophischer Versuch in der Lehre des Unendlichen* from 1883).

of sets, a question which is essentially negotiated between sets and series with the aid of certain reflections:<sup>124</sup> “‘Mapping’ [*Abbildung*] of series onto one another. Problem of cardinal numbers etc. Alternate ‘attribution’ not of unities within a series, but of whole series.” On the other hand, Cantor’s “theory of manifolds” can hardly be understood as a consequence or application of analysis, but rather claims to provide a foundation for the whole realm of mathematical objects with the concept of the set. In this respect, it underlies in particular the theory of numbers that is located at the point of origin of Cassirer’s diagram, but it also underlies the concept of attribution and of the function that are the focus of analysis. Which is supposed to emerge from which here seems eminently debatable. The place of the “theory of manifolds,” therefore, also remains strikingly undetermined: it is neither given a number nor does it display the connecting line to analysis that is used here for dependencies.

Cassirer’s first attempt to supplement his new interest in the specific form of scientific concepts with the outline of a “system of exact sciences” fails. However, this in no way means that Cassirer did not draw any productive conclusions or gain any new insights from this process. Most notably, this failure will compel Cassirer to complete his perspective on the specific form of concepts and to refine conceptually the relationship between the universal and the particular forms of the concept. For the moment, the diagram is once again a stark proof of just how much Cassirer’s perspective on the scientific concept has shifted vis-à-vis his earlier epistemo-critical writings. That is, the decisive problem appears just as Cassirer encounters space, which he regards, like number, as a specific and heterogeneous concept and which he can therefore not derive from the “number-function.” This problem presupposes the inclusion of the specific form of concepts and thus remains completely foreign in *Substance and Function*, which, as in the case of all other scientific concepts, aimed solely at the “inclusion of the spatial concepts in the schema of the pure [series-concepts]” (Cassirer 1923, p. 87). It was thus solely a matter of demonstrating that this “schema” allows the function of all scientific concepts to be justified. The specific differences, in particular in the case of space, even seemed to get in the way of this universal claim that concepts build on series and should essentially be understood as functions. The reason is that, in the Kantian tradition, space was associated with intuition, which for the Marburg school was not supposed to take up an in-

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**124** *Abbildungen*. *Abbild* and *Abbildung*, along with their derivative terms, are difficult to translate in Cassirer’s writings and various English terms (primarily “mapping,” but also including “reflection,” “representation,” and “depiction”) will be employed throughout this text depending on context. I will include the German in brackets wherever doing so would be useful for clarification. -Trans.

dependent role in the justification of knowledge and so came into question as a possible source of resistance to Cassirer’s theory of the concept.<sup>125</sup> As such, Cassirer also understands the “inclusion of the spatial concepts in the schema of the pure serial concepts” programmatically as a “resolution of spatial concepts into serial concepts” (Cassirer 1923, p. 73). Cassirer thereby attributes no significance to the specific form of spatial concepts.

Number suffers the same fate, even if it occupies a completely different role in *Substance and Function* than does space. It can virtually be understood as the paradigm of Cassirer’s theory of the concept, which, however, in turn means that its specific form is not of interest.<sup>126</sup> Number, as it were, is the embodiment of Cassirer’s thesis that concepts do not arise via an abstraction arising from individual objects, but rather determine their objects first and foremost on the basis of relations: a natural number like three does not arise via an abstraction arising from sets that all contain three elements; on the contrary, it is defined by the gradual generation of natural numbers and the simultaneously given relation of the lesser and the greater.<sup>127</sup> In this sense, in *Substance and Function*, number stands for the functional-relational determination of mathematical concept-formation in general, without its specific properties being given any particular attention in comparison with other fundamental concepts in mathematics.

With this background in mind, we can understand why Cassirer put the “Number-Function (N)” as the starting point of his diagram of a “system of exact sciences.” Namely, in so doing, he appears to be citing his old paradigm of the scientific concept in general, which in his epistemo-critical writings, as it were, floated above the fragmented differences of the concrete and specific concepts and was therefore in principle supposed to include every formation of meaning from perception on, ultimately in order to be able to count as paradigmatic, not merely for the scientific concept, but even for the symbolic as such. In contrast, in the context of the *Disposition* from 1917, which takes into account a variety of forms of cultural symbolization and their internal differentiation, the

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**125** In this line of tradition also stands Cassirer’s assertion that space in projective geometry should be comprehended as an understood intuition; cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 91–92).

**126** Cassirer thus remarks as an aside that “we are not interested in the concept of number for its own sake but only as an example of the structure of a pure ‘functional concept’” (Cassirer 1923, p. 37). Similarly, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 27 and 61f.). However, he thereby describes quite precisely the paradigmatic significance of his analysis of number for the central thesis of the functional-relational character of the scientific concept irrespective of the specific differences in concept-formation in various disciplines. It is thus “number” that is bound up with the assertion of function-concepts over substance-concepts in various fields like geometry, physics, or chemistry; cf., e.g., Cassirer (1923, pp. 70–76, 87f., 140f., 189f., and 216f.).

**127** By way of example, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 35f.).



“number-function” should be understood as a more specific characteristic. From the beginning, it is related to the exact sciences and stands for one particular form of mathematical concept-formation. This is also why Cassirer proceeds as a first step to the “mathesis universalis as science of order and measure,” which itself gives only an insufficient and incomplete outline of mathematics. The reason is that Cassirer himself is already turning against the traditional conception of the “mathesis universalis” in *Substance and Function*, against the idea of mathematics as subject to the demands of “*order and measure*” (Cassirer 1923, p. 95).<sup>128</sup> Mathematics should not be understood as a science of the quantitative, since, depending on the relations from which it originates and on the basis of which it determines its objects, it is able to consider qualities just as much as quantities.<sup>129</sup> Mathematics is supposed to be a “pure theory of relations,” with Cassirer adopting a characterization by the mathematician David Hilbert, in which he sees, as it were, the fulfillment of the Leibnizian model, which had already taken the decisive step beyond Descartes’ conception of the *mathesis universalis* (Cassirer 1923, p. 94). Consequently, number, considered in its specific form, can only account for a small part of mathematical concept-formation.

Even within the field of the “mathesis universalis,” however, the attempt to specify additional relevant concept-formations by beginning from the specific form of number runs swiftly into problems. Insofar as Cassirer is compelled by the form of the diagram towards a systematic derivation of the various fundamental concepts from the “number-function,” he immediately encounters in space a different, heterogeneous, and underivable form of the mathematical concept. In this moment, it is not just that the paradigm of the functional concept becomes entangled in the patchwork of differentiated mathematical concept-formations and that the large gap between the demand for a “system of exact sciences” and its implementation in detail comes to the fore. Rather, this failure makes us aware of the decisive conceptual challenge, namely that of acquiring a concept that is specific enough to characterize scientific concept-formation and simultaneously universal enough to encompass the diverse concepts of the exact sciences. Under the assumption that the “system of exact sciences” that is being sought is to be derived from one specific form of the concept, therefore, nothing else remains for Cassirer to do other than to justify anew the relationship between the universality of the concept from which this system is supposed to emerge and the specificity of the elements that it has to encompass.

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**128** For what follows, cf. the whole section, Cassirer (1923, pp. 91–96).

**129** “Again we are led to the Leibnizian conception of mathematics. According to this conception, mathematics is not the general science of magnitude but of form, not the science of quantity but of quality” (Cassirer 1923, p. 92).

Cassirer thus draws the conclusion that the original concept of the exact sciences has to be understood more generally in order to be able to subsume the additional specific concept-formations of mathematics. He adds an additional arrow leading from the subheading of this section of the *Disposition*, “Number-Function,” to the upper margin, where he appends: “probably more correct as superordinate; The ‘function of series-ordering,’ namely: a) as a function of simple series-ordering (‘number’); b) as series-attribution (theory of manifolds); c) as an ordering of juxtaposition: ‘space’” (*Disposition 1917*, pp. 18f.). This “function of series-ordering” is thus supposed to represent one root, out of which arise both number and space, as well as the theory of manifolds. Cassirer does not explain more precisely what is supposed to be understood under this function. Instead, he sets out to make a second attempt at a “system of exact sciences” and refers on the margin at the upper right to an additional sheet: “see on this point explanation on the special sheet! (Exact Science)” (*Disposition 1917*, pp. 18f.).

This sheet by the title of “Exact Science” has, at the present time, been inserted into the corresponding place in the *Disposition*.<sup>130</sup> On the front side of the large folded sheet (see Fig. 4), Cassirer immediately seizes on the quoted instructions to develop a “system of exact sciences” by beginning with a “function of series-ordering.” However, he does not immediately apply himself to a renewed attempt, but rather first makes certain of his project once again. As such, he first assigns a place in the *Disposition* to the postulated “function of ordering and attribution” in a small schematic diagram and thus situates the system that is being sought once again in the context of the new project.<sup>131</sup> Secondly, he depicts those specific concepts that proved to be necessary in the first attempt at a diagrammatical ordering of mathematics side by side in a second schematic dia-

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**130** I will refer to this four-page sheet as *Disposition 1917, Ex. Sci.*, with specification of page number. Thus, for the following citations, cf. *Disposition 1917, Ex. Sci.*, p. 1.

**131** In a small “schema” on the upper third of the page, a “deictic function” is further subdivided into the “psychological function  $\rho$ ,” the “endeictic gesture,” the “logical function of ἀπόδειξις,” and finally the “function of ordering and attribution.” Under the assumption that this is a summary of the already developed parts of the *Disposition*, the place belonging to the postulated root of the exact sciences is once again being identified. Taking the place of the “symbolic,” admittedly, is a “deictic function,” which can presumably be explained by the fact that Cassirer, following Wilhelm Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology*, is pursuing in the first sheets of the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” the thesis that the symbolic has its beginnings in the “indicative” gesture, a point which will be discussed in more detail by the third chapter of the present study. The language of “deictic function” is also found in some of the notes that were likewise probably created in summer 1917 and inserted into the *Disposition*; cf. once again above, p. 29, note 14. I will forgo consulting them in order to avoid getting too caught up in the discussion of the records and their systematic approaches.

Exakte Wissenschaft

Ursprung: Rechtliche Funktion

Logos. Funktion  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} Endlichkeits- \\ charakteristischer \end{array} \right. \left| \begin{array}{l} Logische F. \\ \text{additiv 3, 5} \end{array} \right. \rightarrow \underline{\text{Ordnung = und Zuordnungsfunktion}}$

Ordnungs- und Zuordnungsfunktion. (Funktion A)

<p><u>1/ Die Bildung der einfachen geometrischen Grundrisse</u></p> <p><u>Rechtfunktion</u> [Zeit "s. end."]</p> <p>Der Begriff der <u>Kohlrausch</u> und der <u>ganzen Zahl</u></p> <p>Theorie der <u>ganzen Zahl</u>. Theorie der empirischen Erklärung als <u>Kern</u> der Ordnung der <u>Körper</u> bei der <u>vermuteten</u> <u>geometrie</u></p> <p>Theorie der <u>Abstraktion</u>, <u>repetitiva</u>, <u>irrationale</u> <u>Zahl</u> (aus der einfachen Grundrisse hervorgehend!)</p>	<p><u>2/ Die unendlich gedachte Fläche</u></p> <p><u>Platon</u></p> <p>Die <u>dreifach</u> <u>ausgedehnte</u> <u>Mannigfaltigkeit</u></p> <p>Der <u>n-dimensionale</u> <u>Platon</u> <u>Ordnung</u> <u>den</u> <u>in</u> <u>die</u> <u>Be-</u> <u>ziehung</u> <u>von</u> <u>3/</u></p>
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als Abstraktion: Theorie der Funktion

3/ Mit Mannig- faltigkeit ähnlicher

Abstrakte Kennzeichnung Komplexion Zahlen

Fig. 4: Front side of the folded double sheet on "exact science" that has been inserted into the Disposition for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

gram under the title “function of ordering and attribution (function  $\omega$ ).” In this context, Cassirer appears to understand number, space, and manifold as structures of varying dimensionality: all numbers from the natural to the irrational belong to the “formation of the simple ordered fundamental series,” while three-dimensional space, in contrast, emerges from the “multiply ordered series,” in which case two-dimensional complex numbers, as it were, are supposed to represent the “middle link.”<sup>132</sup> Finally, Cassirer assigns the “arbitrary attribution of complex series” to the “general theory of manifolds” that is relegated entirely to the margin. Cassirer seems here to be making sure of what is to be understood under the postulated “function of ordering and attribution” by explicating the internal structure leading from number, through space, and ultimately to manifolds. He thereby connects the theory of manifolds to the mathematical concept of function when he subsumes to it the “arbitrary attribution of complex series.” This step does not at all appear to be trivial, but Cassirer will nevertheless not discuss it in any detail at this point.

After these preparations, Cassirer now, under the heading “function of ordering and attribution ( $\omega$ )” on the inner two-page spread of the larger folded sheet (see Fig. 5.), undertakes a second attempt to bring the exact sciences as a whole, and initially the fields of mathematics, into a diagrammatical order.<sup>133</sup> As will become clear, however, what is at stake in this undertaking is not merely the “system of exact sciences,” but also the question, which is central to the project of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” of how the relationship between the universal conditions of the symbolic and their specification into a variety of forms of symbolization, as well as their inherent differentiation, is to be conceptualized. As a start, the new diagram can easily be clarified with the help of familiar elements from the first attempt. First, the fields of “arithmetic” and “algebra” are developed from “1) Number” – just as previously from the “concept of mathesis universalis” – at which point Cassirer adds “Number Theory.” Secondly, after the addition of the fundamental concept of “2) Space,” “Pure (Projective) Geometry” seems to emerge therefrom in a straightforward manner, while that concept, together with “1) Number,” gives shape to “Elementary (Metric) Geometry,” which in the first diagram Cassirer had called “geometry of measure.” Thirdly, emerging from the combination of “1) Number” and “3) Attribution of manifolds as such,” in which the “theory of manifolds” returns with a new interpretation, is the “General Function-Concept” or, subdivided further, “1) General Theory

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**132** Complex numbers already occupied the pivotal position between the sequence of numbers and the ordering of space in *Substance and Function*; cf. Cassirer (1923, p. 67).

**133** For the following quotations, cf. *Disposition 1917, Ex. Sci.*, pp. 2–3.



considered concepts, is not a mathematical category.<sup>134</sup> Consequently, it only comes into play to the extent that we take into account disciplines in the natural sciences, and in particular physics, which are indeed supposed to belong to the “system of exact sciences.”

In all probability, therefore, Cassirer adds time for the purpose of expanding the system to include physics. This thesis is proved by the backside of the included sheet, where Cassirer continues his diagram by, as it were, mapping out one of its sections (see Fig. 6). That is, among the newly juxtaposed “a) Number,” “b) Time,” “c) Space,” and “d) Manifolds as such,” he pursues only what emerges from time and space, namely “movement” or “physics.”<sup>135</sup> Instead of pursuing the subsequent points characterizing physics, I would once again like to call attention to the right-hand margin of the sheet, where – as previously in the case of time – there suddenly appears yet again something which cannot be derived from the previous diagram: “Chemistry” emerges from mathematical categories even less than does physics, but no more can it be reduced to a concept of movement, which Cassirer, following in the footsteps of Kant, had already linked closely with physics or mechanics in *Substance and Function*. Cassirer is content to characterize chemistry as a “particularization and attribution of ‘substances’

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**134** On the independence of the sequence of numbers from time, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 39 ff. and 67). On the understanding of arithmetic in Kant, cf. in particular Parsons (1969) and Friedman (1992b, pp. 104–129).

**135** Time is already introduced in *Substance and Function* by way of the conception of movement and its central role in physical mechanics; cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 117 ff.). Cassirer goes further in *Disposition 1917, Ex. Sci.*, p. 4: “The method of physics – ‘description’ and explanation. Meaning of ‘description’: the theory of the physical hypothesis; the hypothesis as an attempt at attribution.” The fact that Cassirer is relying here on the concepts of description and explanation simultaneously might be surprising at first, since he employs them specifically as contrasts in *Substance and Function*: description attempts to account for concrete characteristics of an empirically observed process, while explanation, in contrast, by means of mathematical formalization, gives shape to a logical context in which as many phenomena as possible can be reduced to as few as possible fundamental laws; for examples of description, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 115 ff., 121 f. and 137 f.); for explanation, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 140 f.). In the passage cited from *Disposition 1917*, in contrast, Cassirer is not operating in this tradition of distinguishing between descriptive and explanatory sciences. Instead, he is in all probability referring to the conception of “description” by John Keill, who built into this concept the methodological standards of the physics of his teacher Newton. “Description,” in this context, means primarily to forgo a speculative identification of the essence and the causes of appearances in order to demonstrate the immanent laws of phenomena instead. Cassirer thus readily refers to this concept when dealing with the critique of the representation theory [*Abbildtheorie*] of knowledge; on this point, cf. already *ECW* 3, pp. 336–342, in particular pp. 339–341, and similarly Cassirer (1981, pp. 23–27); in the context of his interpretation of the theory of relativity, cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 402–404, and 1981, pp. 41–43).

a) Licht      b) Zeit      c) Raum      d) Mannigf. Verh.

Parag. 1

(Physik)

Die Methode der Physik - "Rechenbung"  
 und Erklärung  
 von der "Rechenbung":  
 Die Theorie der physikal. Hypothesen  
 Die Hypothese als Grundannahme  
 [Prinzip von Hypothesen: Atom ...]  
 Physik als Erklärung Lehre (Platon  
 von Staat), nicht als Wiederholung der  
 Gesetze  
 als Prinzip möglicher Erklärung-  
methode  
 Am meisten beruht in der physikal. Relativität Lehre  
 als stärkste Wiederholung von dinglichen Gesetzen

Das Relativitätsgesetz

Wirkliche Ausdruck der gegenständl. Erklärung <  
 der physikal. Grundgesetze.  
 Sie dürfen aber keine bestimmte Erklärung haben  
 von der Hypothese für bestimmte Fälle v. Verhalten zur  
Überprüfung & Nutzen...  
 Selbst. Platon v. d.  
Form...

Chemie

Anwendung und Erklärung der Stoffe  
 nach bestimmten Erklärung-  
Methoden  
 d) Die Erklärung der reinen  
Quantität.  
Stoff & Quantitätsverhältnisse  
 multiple Prinzip v. Atom  
Lehre.

b) qualitative Erklärung  
Physik  
 "Erklärung der Stoffe  
 nicht & nicht &  
 drehend etc.

Genau so wie die Erklärung  
 der Erklärung zum  
Prinzip, Prinzip  
 von der Erklärung der  
Erklärung es nötig ist.  
 Das Prinzip Erklärung der  
 "die Erklärung Erklärung"

Fig. 6: Back side of the double folded sheet on "exact science" that has been inserted into the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

[‘*Stoffe*’]” under the presupposition of quantitative or qualitative criteria. This wording, thus, might still suggest a certain proximity to the other disciplines, but it can hardly conceal the fact that chemistry does not really fit in with this “system of exact sciences.” Considered as part of the diagram, rather, it seems to stand for that which is underivable, which Cassirer encounters again and again in his attempt to sketch out a “system of exact sciences.”

Cassirer’s diagrammatical efforts towards an ordering of the sciences and their fundamental concepts thus highlight starkly some fundamental conceptual questions and central systematic challenges of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” Firstly, they prove that Cassirer does react to Hönlswald’s critique and that he goes beyond a general theory of the concept by focusing on the specific differences between the fundamental concepts of various fields of mathematics and other disciplines and simultaneously seeking to outline them as a system. Secondly, however, the resultant difficulties demonstrate that the relationship of the concept in general to its particularizations, and thereby ultimately the relationship between the general definition of the symbolic and the specific forms of symbolization, is not yet fully determined.

The first diagram evokes the idea that the system of the sciences arises from one common root, not merely verbally in its language of “emergence,” but also graphically via the bifurcated lines. Consequently, Cassirer would accept the claim that the specifications of scientific concepts into their particularizations should be derived from one single fundamental concept. Such a claim is, admittedly, not expressed explicitly in these pages and therefore might perhaps seem far-fetched, but is not necessarily implausible to impute to Cassirer. Finally, he had already, in his theory of the scientific concept, advocated the thesis that concepts are universal specifically in the sense that they include the particular and give rise to it.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, in the system of the sciences according to Hönlswald’s determination, we are no longer dealing with the particular thing that is subsumed under a concept, but rather with the particularization that a concept undergoes during its specification. Cassirer, however, fails to withstand the systematic challenge of deriving the specific fundamental concepts of the exact sciences and their particular fields from one concept when he repeatedly encounters underivable concepts and has to presuppose them as additional fundamental concepts. Number, with which Cassirer begins in the first diagram, thus has to be supplemented by space as its own specific form of the mathematical concept. But both physics and chemistry are based on specific conceptual presuppositions that cannot be derived from mathematical concepts.

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136 Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 19f.).



In the second diagram, therefore, several lines lead not from the more general concept to its specifications, but rather refer back from a scientific domain to additional conceptual presuppositions. As a result,  $\Lambda$ -shaped bifurcations no longer dominate as in the first diagram, but rather V-shaped lines. In this graphical change from  $\Lambda$ -forms to V-forms, the model of the “emergence” of the scientific domains from one root is suspended, especially since the “function of ordering and attribution ( $\omega$ )” is moved into the title in the second diagram, and therefore is no longer portrayed as a root of the system. The order of the diagram thus allows us to see that the “system of exact sciences” and their specific fundamental concepts cannot be derived from one single basic concept. Rather, the V-shaped constructions of the second diagram suggest the idea that the various fields of mathematics would emerge from a combinatorics of previous basic concepts like number, space, and time, in which case the question of what justifies these basic concepts in turn would admittedly require clarification. Hence, there arises an alternative understanding of the relationship between the specific domains and the fundamental concepts of the sciences: instead of assuming one conception of the scientific concept or one small set of basic concepts as a foundation for specifying the scientific domains and justifying their systematic order, we can begin with these domains as they have developed historically in order to reflect on their respective conceptual presuppositions. Taking the place of the derivation of a system that is grounded on the concept and unfolds that concept step by step is a reflection that begins with the historical fact of the sciences in order to systematize as far as possible the fundamental concepts that differentiate them.

In the diagrams of a “system of exact sciences” and the graphical change from  $\Lambda$ - to V-forms, thus, we find evidence of a methodological choice that will be of decisive significance for the whole project of a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” and which the present study still has to discuss in more detail: instead of taking the concept of the symbolic, in accordance with Hegel’s effective but unidirectional model, as his point of departure for deduction and justification, Cassirer focuses on a reflective approach in the sense employed by the Kantian tradition. He will thereby develop further the model of transcendental reflection on the necessary conditions of knowledge and its objects and adapt the requirements of his project of a philosophy of culture primarily by reference to the historical development and empirical diversity of forms of symbolization.

This thesis can be proved by other means than via the diagrams under discussion, and it will be necessary to expound it further in the second chapter by reference to Cassirer’s rereading of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Looking back to the epistemo-critical writings, there is already some evidence that Cassirer takes a decidedly reflective stance. Generally speaking, it can be as-

sumed that his philosophizing is influenced by Kant’s philosophy and by transcendental reflection. In the context that has been discussed here, however, it is of greater interest that Cassirer’s reflection on the conditions of knowledge consistently begins with the sciences as historical facts. His efforts towards a “system of exact sciences,” therefore, should always be viewed in connection with what we might call Cassirer’s epistemo-critical “empiricism”: the fundamental concepts of mathematics were thus justified already in *Substance and Function* not merely by philosophy, but were rather first and foremost worked out by means of an engagement with the development and the current state of scientific research that was both knowledgeable and meticulous. In addition, philosophical analysis of the sciences and their concepts thus constantly remains linked with their historical development – all fundamental concepts that philosophy is capable of reaching must therefore themselves be understood as historical.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Cassirer’s first great systematic work is closely connected to his historical study *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age* from 1906/1907, which also frequently incorporates the general history of culture alongside the history of philosophy and science. Cassirer’s epistemo-critical reflection should thus constantly be viewed in close connection to this historical development, and it ultimately presupposes the givenness of scientific findings and disciplines, a point which Cassirer will express both explicitly and programmatically in the posthumously published study *Goals and Means of the Knowledge of Reality [Ziele und Wege der Wirklichkeitserkenntnis]* from 1936/1937.<sup>138</sup> The great significance that Cassirer attributes to the historical

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**137** In the background of this philosophical self-understanding of Cassirer’s epistemo-critical writings stands the transformation of the *a priori* that was carried out in the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism, a transformation in which Cassirer also takes part in *Substance and Function*; cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 268f.). I will return to this topic in the second chapter.

**138** “Only a complete overview of the activity of science itself, of the problems to which it is led in its operation, and of the means that it employs for their solution, can make the decision here. Before we approve or reject the individual approaches that are possible here, before we make a judgment concerning their logical value or disvalue, we must attempt to become completely familiar with them. The following investigations are directed towards such a process of familiarization, which the act of making a decision on the question of justification and validity, the question of the ‘quid juris,’ cannot precede, but rather can only follow. We are thus not making an attempt at an interpretation of the various forms of knowledge of reality from the top down or from the outside – we would rather allow all these forms, as it were, to interpret themselves by unfolding before us and clarifying for us in this unfolding their articulation, their context, and their particularization. In addition, the question of the ‘cause’ of this articulation neither can nor should concern us here at the beginning. Instead of inquiring into the ‘why,’ we must first inquire merely into the ‘what’ and the ‘how.’ For it seems that the question of why, if it is brought in too early and if it is pursued one-sidedly in one particular direction, does more harm than

unfolding of the sciences, as well as the enormous work that he invested into the study of the various disciplines, are no less valuable indications of the fact that his “system of exact sciences” should always be viewed on the horizon of a reflection that begins with the history of modern science and its differentiation into various disciplines.

## Additional Types of Specification: Aesthetics and the Arts

In the preceding sections, we pursued the conceptual movement that is characteristic of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” Firstly, the generalization of the scientific concept to the symbolic entails a number of consequences. Secondly, it requires the respecification of the symbolic for individual forms of symbolization. Thirdly, Cassirer sketches out this respecification experimentally for the scientific concept itself. Fourthly, he implements this respecification up to the level of the specific concepts of individual disciplines and fields of scientific work. Fifthly, all of this ultimately proves that it is at least probable that Cassirer is not taking a deductive approach, but rather a reflective one. For this reason, sixthly, the task of specifying the symbolic is bound up with the necessity of gaining familiarity with or awareness of the facts. Finally, for a seventh point, reflection on the philosophy of the symbolic can thus not be understood without giving a historical or empirical account of these facts, which, in accordance with the basic idea of specification, can themselves be depicted as diverse and differentiated states of affairs in their own right.

The way in which the *Disposition* progresses will further confirm this analysis. After the section “(IV) General Doctrine of Knowledge,” which is barely one page long, has outlined an “epistemology of the symbolic” and in so doing referred primarily to central notions from *Substance and Function*,<sup>139</sup> the section “(V) The Fundamental Problems of Aesthetics” proves the essential significance of specification at the level of “symbol-forms” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 21). Namely, Cassirer, with a view to the arts – as before with respect to “psychology” and the “logic of the symbolic” – emphasizes, on the one hand, the fact that “the

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good to our ability to attain an unobstructed view of the multiplicity of problems and phenomena that exist here” (*ECN 2*, p. 7).

**139** These key points cite primarily two sets of arguments from the older work: the relationship between “universal” and “particular” and the “problem of ‘empirical reality’” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 20). Having said that, I will not discuss the remarks on the lower margin of the page, which pertain to the difference between “empirical science” and the “science of history.” They were probably added later, as indicated by the thick lines.

symbolic” should not be thought of as a phenomenon within art, but rather as its essential condition; on the other hand, however, he thereby inquires simultaneously into the independence and differentiation of the aesthetic: “Once again, what should initially be put into question is not the role of the symbolic in aesthetics (the question is almost exclusively posed in this manner!), but rather the constitutive role of the ‘symbolic’ in delineating the aesthetic ‘point of view,’ the aesthetic ‘region!’ Thus, it is precisely analogous to the above case of the logical! [cf. General Disposition, Sheet IIa!]” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 21). The symbolics of art is apparently supposed to be of help simultaneously in comprehending art’s universal conditions and its specific characteristics, in which context it stands on equal footing with other forms of symbolization like the scientific concept. From a systematic perspective, Cassirer is here drawing on what he had already developed historically in *Freedom and Form*, namely the “Discovery of the Aesthetic World of Forms.”<sup>140</sup>

In order to characterize the specific form of artistic symbolization, on Cassirer’s view, we first require a systematic condition. Namely, it must first be recognized as a form of symbolization at all, which is why Cassirer, as he had already done in his study on the history of ideas, turns against the view that the arts must conform to the “standard of absolute reality,” which would be given by other means (*Disposition 1917*, p. 21).<sup>141</sup> In the idea of imitation or mimesis, according to Cassirer, both idealist and empiricist aesthetics fail to offer an appropriate characterization of art and its peculiar laws: “We do not posit one level as ‘the’ absolutely real one – rather, we ask: which positive, qualitatively determined form [*Gestaltungsform*] corresponds to the aesthetic ‘view’” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 22). But even theories of art as semblance, illusion, or play still remain caught up by that standard in a merely negative characterization. Cassirer therefore pleads for a conceptual reevaluation that can allow for a conception of design [*Gestaltung*] and of a “specific mode of formation” to take the place of an aesthetic theory of mimesis and depiction [*Abbild*].<sup>142</sup> Cassirer indicates how this “mode of formation” should be understood only in a brief note on Lessing’s *Laocoön*, which takes up a similar passage from *Freedom and Form* and which hints at a characterization of individual arts by reference to the “specific

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**140** Thus reads the title of the second chapter of *ECW 7*, pp. 66–148, although in the third edition, to which *ECW 7* conforms, “emergence” has taken the place of “discovery.”

**141** *Disposition 1917*, p. 23 further reads: “The positive meaning of the aesthetic function as such; the core of the symbolic peculiar to it is once again thoroughly obscured by the concept of ‘imitation’ and something that is to be imitated.”

**142** “Schiller’s theory of semblance and play, therefore, should rather be recast into the positive ‘image theory’ of aesthetics as one specific mode of formation” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 22).

‘signs’” used in each case.<sup>143</sup> Thus, the specification of the “symbol-form” also continues in the context of the aesthetic to the point of its internal differentiations: “This deepening into ‘signs’ leads to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic form of expression (as positively specific, as viewed in its own terms, not from the perspective of the object) as such. The specific aesthetic ‘regions’ under aesthetics as an overarching region” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 24).

The points on aesthetics do not go beyond these hints in any significant way. Nonetheless, with his demand that the “specific mode of formation” of art be taken into consideration, Cassirer has found a means of access to the field of the aesthetic that fits in with the approach of his project of a philosophy of the symbolic: in aesthetics, as in the theory of knowledge, the process of formation towards reality takes the place of the reflection of a given reality, such that art can be understood as one specific form of the symbolic. The essential conceptual innovation that pervades the whole *Disposition* from 1917, thus, is the fact that the symbolic is simultaneously universal and specific, that it encompasses all forms of symbolization and at the same time is only realized in these concrete specifications. In order to describe these specifications and to reflect on their context, however, it is necessary to have precise knowledge of them. As such, only after a comprehensive investigation into aesthetics, based solely on the foundation of a careful “empiricism” that has yet to be created, does Cassirer believe that philosophical reflection on the “specific mode of formation” of art and the arts can proceed. The *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” from 1917 thus does not merely formulate the new project; it also maps out the fields of concrete, material studies. Instead of further explanations, therefore, Cassirer follows up with a bibliography, which should also be understood as a reference to future investigations that are necessary in this field.

## The “Metaphysics of the Symbolic”: Philosophy of the Symbolic and Philosophy of Culture

In the preceding sections, the *Disposition* pursued the various specifications of the symbolic by classifying the older theory of the scientific concept as part of the new approach of a philosophy of the symbolic and by furnishing that theory immediately with a program for the field of aesthetics. Thus, after focusing on the differentiation of symbol-forms, the last section of the *Disposition*, “VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” refers once again to the accomplishments of the

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143 Cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 93f.

symbolic in general: just as, at the beginning, “psychology” dealt with the symbolic conditions of the mental, the following pages, in a complementary manner, touch on the very same symbolic conditions of reality (*Disposition* 1917, p. 25). The keywords concerning the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” are thereby connected to the problem of the specification of the symbolic, and they reveal the systematic orientation of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic by accentuating the unity and diversity of symbol-forms.

To begin, however, it is necessary to explain the title of the last section of the *Disposition*, which may initially come as a surprise to those who are familiar with Cassirer’s philosophy. The title of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” is surprising primarily against the backdrop of Cassirer’s earlier epistemo-critical writings. There, Cassirer had either used the word “metaphysics” to describe historical positions – such as, e.g., “Aristotelian metaphysics” – or as a label for systematic positions standing in opposition to Kant’s epistemological reflection. In this systematic respect, metaphysics chiefly includes the assumption of things existing in themselves that would then be reflected in knowledge, whereas Cassirer, in proper Kantian tradition, understands them as the results of a process of objectivization based on the conditions of experience and knowledge: “What metaphysics ascribes as a *property* to things in themselves now proves to be a necessary element in the process of objectification” (Cassirer 1923, pp. 303f.).<sup>144</sup> Cassirer therefore understood his own philosophizing, in accordance with his teachers in the Marburg school, as a critique of metaphysics (as well as of empiricism).<sup>145</sup> Against this backdrop, the fact that he now concludes the draft for his new project with a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” raises the question of Cassirer’s fundamental self-understanding of his “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”<sup>146</sup>

Cassirer’s observations concerning a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” however, are in no way bound up with an obviation of Neo-Kantian reflection, as the *Disposition* will swiftly demonstrate. That is, Cassirer is by no means introducing the assumption of a reality that exists in itself when he speaks of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic.” No more does he use that term to refer to a historical position that would be worth resurrecting with an eye to such an assumption. Rather, Cassirer relies on the concept of metaphysics because he wants to take up its

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**144** Cf. also Cassirer (1923, p. 237): “The motive peculiar to all *metaphysics of knowledge* is here revealed. What appears and acts in the process of knowledge as an inseparable unity of conditions is hypostatized on the metaphysical view into a conflict of things.”

**145** Cf. Natorp (2015, pp. 181–184).

**146** Carl H. Hamburg commented on this changed attitude towards metaphysics quite early; cf. Hamburg (1949, pp. 116f.).

“fundamental problem” at the most general level and to attempt to deal with it anew. Already in the first lines of the headings on the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” he insists: “We begin with the fundamental problem of metaphysics – with the relationship between truth and reality –” (*Disposition* 1917, p. 25).

This approach, at least in the case of knowledge, does not represent a novelty within Cassirer’s texts. In particular, in the chapter “The Concept of Reality” from *Substance and Function*, Cassirer argued in a classically Neo-Kantian manner that the “transcendence” of reality arises from the existence or the truth of judgments.<sup>147</sup> Truth and reality should therefore ultimately be understood as correlates in the process of knowledge, just like thinking and being or subject and object. In Cassirer’s view, they are only separated from one another, spatialized, and substantialized by “metaphysics,” eventually to the point that they can no longer be mediated with one another and instead are set in opposition to one another.<sup>148</sup> It is thus surprising indeed that Cassirer links his approach of a philosophy of the symbolic with the title of metaphysics. However, he is referring by that term to a “fundamental problem” whose Kantian solution he had already sketched out in *Substance and Function*: every object stands under the conditions of its subjective cognition, every being should in principle be conceived of as the result of a synthesis in thought, and all objective reality can only be given in the mode of judgment and its truth.

Against this backdrop, it can be assumed that Cassirer is also returning to the “fundamental problem of metaphysics” in the *Disposition* from 1917 in order to supply it with a Neo-Kantian solution. This assumption is confirmed by the historical appeal that, as is so often the case, serves as Cassirer’s first move. First and foremost, he takes up the work of Parmenides and Descartes and takes a stance in particular against a traditional understanding of knowledge as a “representation” [*Abbildern*] of a reality that exists in itself: whether representations [*Vorstellungen*] are supposed to be explained as “reflections” [*Abbilder*] of the objects that produce them, as in a tradition stretching from Ar-

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**147** “In general it appears, that the further we advance into the particular conditions of the problem of reality, the more clearly it unites with the problem of truth. If it is once understood how knowledge attains a constancy of certain predicates and establishes judgmental connections, then the ‘transcendence’ of the object as opposed to the mere presentation [*Vorstellung*, Trans.] no longer offers any difficulty” (Cassirer 1923, p. 286).

**148** “The characteristic procedure of metaphysics does not consist in transcending the field of knowledge in general, – for beyond this field there would not be even material for a possible question, – but in separating collective standpoints within the field of knowledge itself and thus transforming what is logically correlative into an opposition of things ... At no point is this feature so significant as in the old question as to the relation of thought and being, of the subject and object of knowledge” (Cassirer 1923, p. 271).

istotle, through the medieval theory of species, and up to empiricism, or whether objects are explained as likenesses of the ideas, a theory for which he names Plato as the paradigm, Cassirer always views “the necessity of the symbolic itself, its inability to be annulled” as insufficiently reflected, because there is an immediate return from the reflection [*Abbild*] to the “archetype” [*Urbild*], reality itself, whether it is now understood from the standpoint of empiricism or idealism (*Disposition 1917*, p. 28). In this way, the productive character of the mediation of truth and reality fades into the background. In contrast, via the question of the symbolic, this specific capacity is supposed to take center stage in philosophical reflection.<sup>149</sup>

From this perspective, Cassirer addresses the “fundamental problem of metaphysics” and attempts to draw out the consequences of the Neo-Kantian approach to their full extent. From the *Disposition*’s historical appeal, we can see that this point of departure lies in the “overcoming of representation theory [*Abbildtheorie*] in the ‘Copernican turn,’” which can perhaps be counted as the central theme of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, but which was first and foremost a reference to the “positively specific characteristic of the knowledge-function” (*Disposition 1917*, pp. 28 f).<sup>150</sup> Cassirer therefore views the question of knowledge, on the one hand, as a decisive paradigm for the Copernican turn and for the operation of the symbolic that it brings into focus: “Only thereby is the idea of imitation overcome: the allegory has transitioned into the positive ‘symbol’” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 29). On the other hand, knowledge now represents merely one form of symbolization, such that the Copernican turn must also be carried out for the other forms: “New relationship between truth and reality! Positive implementation of this relationship” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 30).<sup>151</sup>

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**149** In *Disposition 1917*, p. 17, thus, Cassirer also affirms: “Even the ‘knowledge of objects’ indeed remains – symbolic, given that it does not give the ‘thing in itself.’”

**150** Just after the quoted formulation, Cassirer explains: “this function does not reproduce the object, but rather it constitutes this object – indeed, it ‘is’ the object itself. Precisely the same development appeared earlier in aesthetics! To this extent, the law of the logical the – ‘author of nature!’” With the formulation of “author of nature,” Cassirer, as he also does, for example, in *ECW 4*, p. 350 or Sheet 8, p. 7, adopts a Kantian formulation taken from *CPJ*, A 460/B 466. It strikes to the heart of the problem of the reflective judgment, to which the second chapter of the present study is dedicated.

**151** The catchphrase of the “Copernican turn” thus also pervades the records in a manner that is hardly surprising; cf. Sheet 8, p. 7 (pages concerning “4) Logic, Science”), Sheet 10, p. 3, and Sheet 25, p. 1. Cf. also the introduction to *ECW 11*, pp. 7–9, as well as *ECW 12*, p. 35. The first outlines thus confirm the striking observations made on the close connection between the Copernican turn and the “discovery of the symbol” by Renz (2002, pp. 82–87).



Cassirer's "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" thus goes beyond his epistemo-critical writings to the extent that Neo-Kantian reflection is now supposed to include our comprehension of reality in all its forms and is to be carried out for the specific conditions of symbolization in each case. Sheet 7 from his working notes also demonstrates how Cassirer primarily sketches out the main features of his new project by broadening his epistemo-critical approaches. Under the title "In General on the 'Problem of the Symbol,'" Cassirer deals once again with the proposed expansion of the "Copernican turn" beyond the "isolated logical function": "we are seeking to encompass all the various forms of worldview and world-understanding in the same way" (Sheet 7, p. 1). He thus relates his plan to Kant's theory of cognition and thereby suggests a methodological continuity: "In this sense, the task of the mere critique of reason broadens for us to a critique of spiritual symbols as such – the critique of the 'understanding' [*des 'Verstandes'*] to that of 'understandings' [*des 'Verständnisses'*]. All modes of world-understanding belong to it at the same time: and around them we, like Copernicus, rotate the object – the world" (Sheet 7, p. 2). The "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" thus represents an expansion and simultaneously a differentiated implementation of Kant's epistemological approach. For that reason, however, it should by no means be misunderstood as a stubborn insistence on familiar foundations. The reason is that the quoted formulation from Sheet 7 is already reminiscent of the famous passage in the introduction to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that announces the program of a fundamental transformation of Kantian critique: "With this, the critique of reason becomes a critique of culture" (ECW 11, p. 9). Apparently, the implementation of Kant's reflection for new domains of understanding reality required methodological adaptations over the course of the work. The Neo-Kantian approach may not, therefore, be understood from the outset as a program that is carried out with no regard for the objects. For the purposes of interpretation, it should already, in light of Cassirer's new project of a philosophy of culture, be seen as a heuristic directive whose implementation is essentially open to the objects.<sup>152</sup>

The fact that Cassirer does not regard Kantian philosophy and the Copernican turn as a fixed program, but rather as a task that also always includes the possibility of expansions in terms of content and methodological adaptations, can be proved by way of his general sketch of *Kant's Life and Thought*. Namely, in this piece, which was published in 1918 but already prepared in manuscript form in 1916, Cassirer depicts the Copernican turn, not as the result of the efforts

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<sup>152</sup> With particular reference to the role of the "transcendental method" in Neo-Kantianism, cf. also Capeillères (1992, in particular pp. 518–525).

of the “pre-critical Kant,” but rather chiefly as a new philosophical task.<sup>153</sup> That is to say, it should be understood as a task to the extent that it lays out a variety of fruitful consequences, continuations, and transformations, but by no means unfolds them. This perspective, as Cassirer portrays it, first gives us a glance at Kant’s subsequent philosophizing and relates the first *Critique* to the following *Critiques*, which similarly carry out “expansions” and “revisions.”<sup>154</sup> But even beyond Kant, on Cassirer’s view, the Copernican turn remains one of the “permanent tasks of philosophy itself” (Cassirer 1981, p. 3).<sup>155</sup> In the points on “Metaphysics,” the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” stands on the horizon of precisely this task.

It is therefore anything but accidental that probably the first, although little appreciated anticipation of the later project of a philosophy of culture is found in Cassirer’s depiction of the Copernican turn in *Kant’s Life and Thought*. In allusion to the Kantian transformation of “metaphysics,” which focuses on the formative conditions of the objects of our experience, Cassirer states: “‘Metaphysics’ must be the metaphysic of the sciences, the theory of principles of mathematics and natural knowledge, or, if it claims specific content for itself, it must be the metaphysic of morality, of right, of religion, or of history. It integrates these multiple objective mental directions and activities as a single problem, not so as to make them vanish in this unity but so as to illuminate the essential individuality and proper limitation of each of them. In this way philosophy is shown to be the necessary starting point of the entirety of intellectual and spiritual culture as it is given to us. Philosophy, however, no longer wishes to accept that culture as given, but rather to make its origin and the universally valid norms governing and guiding it comprehensible” (Cassirer 1981, p. 154). The Copernican turn is thus related here to the “given whole of intellectual and spiritual culture,” with the ultimate purpose of outlining a philosophy of culture in transcendental reflection. This programmatic outline shows, on the one hand, just how little the

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**153** For what follows, cf. the whole passage, Cassirer (1981, pp. 144–155). Cassirer himself notes that the manuscript was “ready for the press in the spring of 1916” (Cassirer 1981, p. 2).

**154** With respect to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cassirer states: “The task arises of seeing in detail how far this transformation confirms the earlier foundations and how far it extends and adjusts them” (Cassirer 1981, p. 287). Cassirer thus interprets the three *Critiques* as the unfolding of a three-part system of cognition, ethics, and aesthetics, which was by no means achieved by the *Critique of Pure Reason* and which is indeed not even apparent in that text; cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 216f.). As Cassirer emphasizes, it is therefore the systematic challenges, and not anything like Kant’s systematic compulsiveness, that lead Kant from *Critique* to *Critique*; cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 272–275).

**155** This is said in reference to Hermann Cohen, who had already taken up this task with respect to the “general problems of the German spirit” (Cassirer 1981, p. 3).

appeal to Kant, on Cassirer's view, precludes going beyond Kant, although here, as later in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, he conflates the Kantian understanding with culture in a quite straightforward manner.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, this outline exhibits several revealing parallels to the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from the *Disposition* from 1917, and so it does not merely prove once again that the new project of a philosophy of the symbolic should be viewed on the horizon of Kant's Copernican turn, but rather also supplies a first answer to the question of why, precisely, the last section of the *Disposition* bears the title of a "metaphysics of the symbolic": since Cassirer is returning to the "fundamental problem" of metaphysics in order to draw out the consequences of Kant's Copernican turn to the full extent of our understandings of reality, he can certainly appeal to Kant himself, who consistently regarded critical reflection as a necessary preliminary step for a well-grounded metaphysics.<sup>157</sup> Such an appeal to Kant's understanding of metaphysics would, in turn, represent both an appeal to the Kantian tradition as well as its purposeful further development.

Admittedly, Cassirer's language of a "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" might have had more to do with the contemporary context. In the years surrounding 1917, metaphysics had become the slogan for a variety of philosophical trends that stood in opposition to Neo-Kantianism and its ostensible narrowing of philosophy to epistemology. In the omnibus review "Epistemology alongside the Limit Questions of Logic and the Psychology of Thinking" ["Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik und Denkpsychologie"] from 1927, Cassirer himself recalls with respect to Nicolai Hartmann's *Metaphysics of Knowledge* [*Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*] from 1921: "When this work first appeared, it was lauded by many of those who were sick of the 'criticalist impulse' ['kritizistischen Denkwanges'] as a 'rebirth of metaphysics'" (*ECW* 17, p. 79). Also, according to the assessment of Herbert Schnädelbach, after the turn of the century there arose under the "rallying cry" of metaphysics numerous critics of Neo-Kantianism who set themselves in opposition to the alleged reduction of reality to the objects of cognition and developed a variety of forms of "[m]etaphysics, reawakened as ontology" (Schnädelbach 1984, p. 193).<sup>158</sup> As Cassirer makes clear in his review, he encounters straightaway the fact that the met-

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156 "Only now do we fully understand Kant's statement, that the torch of the critique of reason does not light up the objects unknown to us beyond the sense world, but rather the shadowy space of our own understanding. The 'understanding' here is not to be taken in the empirical sense, as the psychological power of human thought, but rather in the purely transcendental sense, as the whole of intellectual and spiritual culture" (Cassirer 1981, pp. 154f.).

157 On this point, cf. the "Preface" to the first edition in *CPR*, A VII–XXII.

158 Cf. the whole chapter, "Being," in Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 192–218).

aphysics of the time understands itself as an ontology in a quite straightforward manner. He thus, with a view to Hartmann, rejects any approach that does not permit any “analysis of the concept of knowledge” to precede the “analysis [...] of the concept of being,” and which thereby, in turn, asserts “the primacy of ontology over mere ‘gnoseology’” (*ECW* 17, p. 67). Thus, Cassirer is here, as in the *Disposition* from 1917 and its critical discussion of reflection [*Abbild*], setting himself in opposition to an “ontological metaphysics” (*ECW* 17, p. 14). The “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” should be understood in this context as a counter-project that begins with the “relationship between truth and reality,” draws out the consequences of Kant’s Copernican turn, and applies them to the diversity of symbolic mediations. Cassirer thus seems to want to take up the critique of Neo-Kantianism and simultaneously to steer it down the path of his own project, given that he goes decidedly beyond the question of knowledge while simultaneously relying on Kantian reflection. The keyword of metaphysics thus has a quite polemical undertone.<sup>159</sup>

However, in spite of this polemical constellation, Cassirer’s points concerning a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” likewise demonstrate certain similarities with the zeitgeist. Immediately following the cited programmatic formulations, thus, Cassirer falls back on widespread tropes of the time when he understands the diversity of our understandings of reality as a concrete expression of “life.” Being is bound up with life, and at Kant’s side stands Goethe: “In Goethe’s words: ‘We become aware of what is true in things as incomprehensible life.’ We behold this life, which is for itself and freely ‘incomprehensible,’ within the various symbolic levels: Knowledge, Art, Philosophy, Religion” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 30). The metaphysics of the symbolic is thus not merely supposed to implement the notion of the symbolic mediation of being within the various domains of reality. It is supposed to comprehend this mediation as a process that is just as productive as it is diverse, and ultimately as a living process. The symbolic is not merely productive in the sense that it makes reality accessible to us; it “lives,” in the sense that it transforms and unfolds itself: “The symbol in this sense – this unity, which always remains the same in the next case and the next, again and again – this is perhaps the final form of metaphysics that is possible for us! Not the goal, but rather the series itself is what identifies this metaphysics; because the goal would be – death; only the series itself is

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**159** With respect to the posthumous volume and the title “Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms,” Orth speaks of an “ironic title”; cf. Orth (1993, pp. 9–30, here p. 11). In contrast, I am choosing for the earlier *Disposition* a formulation that is less suggestive of a stance of ironic distance, and which instead emphasizes Cassirer’s willingness to engage in discussions and thereby to adopt a clear position.

life!” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 32).<sup>160</sup> It is multiplicity and unity, the concretion and the transformation of the phenomena in question, that Cassirer, with the help of the concept of life and via an appeal to Goethe, depicts as the heart of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic.”<sup>161</sup>

This constellation of concepts, semantics, and references is anything but unique around 1900. Goethe, whose particular significance for Cassirer’s philosophy was emphasized early on by John Michael Krois,<sup>162</sup> plays a central role for other thinkers at the time, and he was counted as a spokesman for a conception of reality that comprehends it as living and dynamic, concrete and intuitable.<sup>163</sup> Cassirer’s points on the “metaphysics of the symbolic” also seem to be in line with this commitment, which inevitably situates them in close proximity to the philosophy of life of the time.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, as Christian Möckel has shown in his authoritative study, Cassirer is also already engaging intensively with the concept of life in his early writings, in particular in *Freedom and Form*, though also in *Kant’s Life and Thought*, albeit rather casually.<sup>165</sup> He relies on this concept gladly and often, broadly in order to underscore the transformation of the objects under discussion, and in particular to emphasize the correspondence of subjective lived experience and its objective expression.

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**160** The “this” in the first sentence is not possible to read cleanly due to a correction.

**161** In particular, Sheet 43, which is printed in *ECN* 1, p. 264, depicts this connection clearly.

**162** Cf. Krois (1987, pp. 176–182; 1995, in particular pp. 303–308; and 2002). However, cf. also a writer as early as Slochower (1949, pp. 647 ff.), as well as, for examples of newer works on the significance of Goethe for Cassirer’s thought, Naumann (1998, in particular pp. 71–105) and Skidelsky (2008, pp. 75–89). The importance of Cassirer’s reading of Goethe has been firmly emphasized by the publication of additional texts from the estate; cf. in particular *ECN* 10 and *ECN* 11.

**163** Cf. Möckel (2005, pp. 74 f., and for greater detail 2003, with particular reference to Cassirer on pp. 155 ff.).

**164** This also holds true with a view to the evocation of the intuitibility of the symbolic, as made clear by, e.g., Stephenson’s critique of Naumann’s rather modernizing interpretation, which seeks out connections to present-day sign theory; cf. Stephenson (2004, pp. 164–170). He argues, among other things by reference to Goethe’s phrase, often referenced by Cassirer, that all fact is already theory, that, in the “symbolic,” it is not merely that the universal and the particular come together, even in the sense that the universal determines the particular and can nevertheless only be conceived of by beginning with the particular. He also emphasizes the fact that this relationship is demonstrated in the symbolic phenomenon itself, and that it thereby touches on (aesthetic) perception.

**165** Cf. Möckel (2005, pp. 15 f.), where the central thesis is formulated, as well as the rich first two chapters on Cassirer’s appeals to the concept of life in his texts up through 1921 in Möckel (2005, pp. 25–140).

In using the concept of life, however, Cassirer is simultaneously breaking away from central assumptions of certain positions on the philosophy of life, and in particular supporting the thesis that life is not immediately accessible in any lived experience, but rather only becomes experienceable in symbolization.<sup>166</sup> Symbolization thus finds no purchase in any reality of life on this side or that of its symbolic mediation, in purely internal lived experience or in a postulated living reality in itself: according to Cassirer, “[w]e know this ‘life’ only in its ‘expressions’” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 32). Symbolization thus does not pose a contrast to a living and dynamic reality, but should rather be understood as its adequate expression, and even as its progression. On Sheet 13, under the title “On the metaphysics of the symbolic,” Cassirer thus makes it clear that it is only via the transformation of the symbolic that experience of or “participation” in such a life becomes possible at all: “but we cannot for this reason forgo the concept of life! On the contrary: it is the final [concept] – a life itself, in which we ‘participate’ in mutable symbols!” (Sheet 13, p. 3). Consequently, life is found only in the symbolic, and it shows itself in the multifarious transformations of symbolizations. At least to some extent, those arguments are formulated here that Cassirer will put forward for the first time in the introduction to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,<sup>167</sup> elaborate further in the notes on the planned fourth volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* around 1928,<sup>168</sup> and ultimately unfold in his critique of positions from the philosophy of life in “‘Spirit’ and ‘Life’ in the Philosophy of the Modern Day” [“‘Geist’ und ‘Leben’ in der Philosophie der Gegenwart”] from 1930.<sup>169</sup>

In order to grasp the way in which the argument concerning the concept of life unfolds in the points on the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” more precisely, it is necessary to take into account the significance of one additional thinker for the genesis of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic.<sup>170</sup> The reason

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**166** Once again, cf. Möckel (2005, pp. 43–55).

**167** Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 46–49.

**168** Cf. *ECN* 1, pp. 3–109, in particular pp. 8–54, and *ECN* 1, pp. 199–258, in particular pp. 207–229 and 238–251. Cassirer likewise discusses under the watchword of the philosophy of life the metaphysical-speculative observations of Klages, Simmel, Bergson, and Heidegger, as well as the anthropological texts of Scheler and Plessner, which engage with biology.

**169** Cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 185–205.

**170** In what follows, I will focus on a few aspects that are central for the line of thought that is being pursued here, aspects which distinguish Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic from Hegel’s idealism and which lead towards the post-Hegelian challenge of philosophy. For additional information, see the worthwhile article Möckel (2004). Möckel mostly emphasizes Cassirer’s points of overlap with Hegel, while Ferrari, in contrast, highlights the differences; cf. Ferrari (2007, in particular pp. 69–77).

is that Cassirer's argument that life must necessarily 'express' itself is not merely bound up with themes that were already introduced in the "Psychology of the Symbolic" at the beginning of the *Disposition* with respect to the mind. Rather, this formulation illuminates the proximity to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which had already turned against the romantic concept of life and explained the necessity of conceptual expression or mediation with respect to reality. Just as, in the case of consciousness, no "inner" can be thought of without an "outer," so too can no object of experience have access to an "inner essence" without "expressing" itself in symbolizations: "but precisely this is the quintessence of our whole preceding observation that 'expression' is nothing accidental, inessential, 'external,' but rather that it is the necessary, the true, and the sole manifestation of the 'inner' and of the essence itself" (*Disposition* 1917, p. 32).<sup>171</sup> This claim draws on Hegel's arguments, with which Cassirer may have been working at approximately the same time for his historical study on the "post-Kantian systems." In the third volume of the work *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age*, on which Cassirer was presumably already working in 1917, but which will only appear in 1920, the fourth chapter is devoted to Hegel.<sup>172</sup> In particular, he discusses the "essential relationship" that prevails in Hegel between "essence" and "appearance," and which, according to Cassirer, is supposed to develop "in the most general terms, in the reciprocal determination of 'inner' and 'outer'": "The complete combination of all these objects, by virtue of which each of them represents itself adequately in the others, with no difference thus remaining between the existence of inwardness and its revelation in expression, can be described by the concept of *reality*" (*ECW* 4, p. 336).<sup>173</sup> This definition of reality evidently exhibits major parallels to the assumption in the "metaphysics of the symbolic" that reality is only capable of being experienced in its symbolic mediation or expression.

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171 Cf. also the historical account in *ECW* 4, pp. 290–292, as well as the systematic appeal to Hegel in *ECW* 17, pp. 201f.

172 The chronological and systematic context of Cassirer's initially historical engagement with Hegel in the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* and in the conception of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has already been investigated by Möckel (2004, pp. 258f.); for supplemental information, cf. also Möckel (2005, pp. 125–129). Moreover, Cassirer had included a shorter section on Hegel's theory of the state in *Freedom and Form*, which was completed in manuscript form in 1916, which also testifies to the fact that Cassirer was engaging with Hegel around 1917; cf. *ECW* 7, pp. 375–387.

173 Cf. also *ECW* 4, p. 306.

Of the wide-ranging consequences that Cassirer, like Hegel, draws from this fact, only three will be mentioned here. First, externalization, mediation, or symbolization is central in the sense that both the objective world and subjective experience of that world are simultaneously represented therein. Cassirer and Hegel thus begin with the fact that the unfolding of reality in its expressions corresponds to the development of consciousness and its experience, which is why the genuine subject of this historical process is “spirit,” encompassing subject and object, a term which Cassirer employs gladly in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, following Hegel’s model.<sup>174</sup> This thesis simultaneously carries forward, in an altered form, the Kantian conception of the correlation between subject and object and, secondly, opens up the historicity of reality and its experience. Thirdly, philosophy itself cannot keep apart from this historicity and must essentially include it in its own representation or, in Cassirer’s words, its own “implementation”:<sup>175</sup> “To pass through this series, not to remain stuck at the empty ‘inner,’ but rather to depict it in the sequence of its ‘expressions’ is, as Hegel knew quite well, necessary. Cf. the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*” (Sheet 7, p. 5).<sup>176</sup> Cassirer’s “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” will therefore follow in the footsteps of Hegel’s philosophy to the extent that it will relate the “life of spirit” – as is Cassirer’s reformulation – from the outset to the “universal forms of spirit [...], as they are depicted in law and the state, in ethical life and art, in philosophy and religion,” and thereby concretize it in its historical development (*ECW* 4, p. 282).

Cassirer thus takes up Hegel’s arguments in order to take a stand against the hope of the philosophy of life for an immediate intuition, preceding every symbolization, of a dynamic, living reality. At the same time, however, he positions the concept of life against Hegel’s claim of being able to reconstruct the life of spirit, or more specifically the history of the determination of reality and the formation of consciousness, as a dialectical unfolding of the concept, and thereby of being able to apprehend them within a rigorous philosophical system. This claim does not seem to Cassirer to be suited to the task of emphasizing philosophically the diversity of our world-understandings and of the forms of the

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<sup>174</sup> On this point, cf. also the interesting note in *ECN* 1, pp. 266f.

<sup>175</sup> *ECW* 4, p. 348.

<sup>176</sup> And Cassirer adds a shorthand collection of quotations from Hegel’s preface: “But just as there is an empty breadth etc. The power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition. The shortcoming is only the fact that Hegel understands this ‘interpretation’ ultimately one-sidedly in a merely logical-dialectic manner (see previous page!).” Cf. the source in Hegel (1977, p. 6). Cassirer also refers to this passage, e.g., in *ECN* 2, pp. 20f.



symbolic: “But genuine metaphysics is not intended, nor is it permitted, to conceive of this whole merely dialectically, as in Hegel – because we would thereby already be faced once again with a merely abstract individual symbol – rather, in fullness and in context, in the particularity of specifically diverse symbolic expressions, lies for us the unity and the fullness of the world, of reality – From the most primitive expression: from gesture through spoken language to the ‘concept,’ to the aesthetic form, to the religious idea, to myth, there leads here One continuous path, One consistent ‘structure’ – in this path and on this path we have life – not simply as something otherworldly, to which this process only ‘points,’ but rather as the concrete fullness of the diverse itself! Language, Art, Concept, Myth fused into one – each reciprocally lighting up – reflecting – this is the highest point to which even our ‘reflection’ can advance” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 31).

Cassirer’s critique of Hegel follows a popular view of Hegel’s philosophy, the justification of which could certainly be criticized.<sup>177</sup> However, I do not intend to pursue these discussions here, since the present study primarily deals with the genesis of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic. In this respect, the critique of Hegel proves to be productive independently of whether or not it is justified, in that it helps Cassirer to clarify how the symbolic can be conceived of as historical while simultaneously preserving its irreducible multiplicity. To that effect, it is worthwhile, on Cassirer’s view, to resist the Hegelian attempt to apprehend the philosophical retracing of the historical differentiation of cultural spheres as the elaboration of their systematic logic, and thus to depict the historical unfolding of the symbolic as a logical-dialectical development.<sup>178</sup> Cassirer also turns against the “completed implementation of this system” (*ECW* 4, p. 300) in the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge*, since it ultimately sacrifices the “autonomy of the spiritual domains of culture” to the primacy of logic (*ECW* 4, p. 362).<sup>179</sup> Cassirer’s “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” now makes use of the concept of life in order to emphasize the fact that the diversity of symbolizations are only understood as a living and concrete expression of the unfolding of the symbolic to the extent that they evade such a philosophical system and its logical development. The project of deriving the diversity of the symbolic from one principle had already proved to be fundamentally problematic in the *Disposition* when Cassirer attempted to sketch out a “system of exact sciences.” In the

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**177** For a matter-of-fact, sophisticated introduction to Hegel’s philosophy of history and its problem areas, cf., e.g., Angehrn (2012, pp. 91–104).

**178** Cf. *ECW* 4, pp. 295–297, and *ECW* 4, p. 297: “The form of historical becoming is the fulfillment and the completed paradigm of the logical form.”

**179** Cf. also *ECW* 4, p. 354.

“Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” he now distinguishes himself from Hegel by understanding such a project programmatically as an impoverishment of the “concrete fullness of the diverse itself” that his “Philosophy of the Symbolic” is specifically supposed to emphasize.

In using the term life in the singular, thus, Cassirer’s “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” brings to a head a plethora of forms of symbolization, which cannot be constrained into any conceptual system or logical development. In other words, reality shows itself to be living in that it can be experienced in a historical multiplicity of world-understandings in knowledge, language, art, and myth, without developing in a one-dimensional historical process. The reason, as Cassirer once again makes clear in distinguishing himself from a popular conception of Hegel’s philosophy, is that the unfolding of the symbolic into its various forms will no more submit to the idea of a simple succession of forms than to the notion of its sublation into higher levels of development. Cassirer thus explains in the margin of Sheet 7: “The individual does not matter, as in Hegel, at the higher levels only as a sublated moment, but rather we seek to take hold of it in its concrete totality! (Language, myth, art are not overcome and eliminated, but rather specifically maintained. [...])” (Sheet 7, p. 4).<sup>180</sup> In the example of myth, it becomes particularly clear what Cassirer is aiming at with this argument: “there can be no talk of forgoing one of these forms of expression (not even the ‘mythical’; our whole ‘worldview’ is saturated by it!)” (Sheet 7, p. 4).<sup>181</sup> Consequently, myth should not be identified with one epoch of the symbolic at the dawn of history, one which is replaced and sublated by the scientific concept, by aesthetic reflection, but also by its inner development towards religion. Rather, it should simultaneously be comprehended as one “form of expression” or form of symbolization that also continues to remain possible and is even indispensable for our understanding of the world, even if it might no longer be dominant and even if our understanding of the symbolic has long since been characterized by the reflective scientific or aesthetic forms of symbolization. The historical unfolding of the symbolic is thus not merely unending in the sense that, according

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**180** Systematically, the differentiation of expression, representation, and significance should be brought in here in order to discuss the implied context; cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 260 ff., and, with respect to the “survival” of the mythical, chiefly *ECN* 1, p. 234. This differentiation is not yet pronounced in the records with which I am dealing, and would lead me away from the problem that is my focus in what follows. I will thus forgo introducing this distinction.

**181** Thus, myth is not simply replaced by other forms of the symbolic (cf. Sheet 10, p. 2), nor is immediate intuition completely supplanted by scientific comprehension; cf. Sheet 15, pp. 2f. On the “peculiar survival of the fundamental and primordial themes of myth,” cf. also later in *ECW* 16, pp. 180 f., as well as *ECW* 12, pp. 17 f.

to Cassirer, it has, like all life, an open future instead of one individual goal.<sup>182</sup> It is also unending because it does not have done with its past, and thereby preserves the forms of the symbolic by means of which it is able to develop this past in its diversity.

Cassirer's critique of a philosophical system on Hegel's model and his use of the concept of life thus make clear the fact that the "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" is an attempt to do justice to the diversity of specific forms of symbolization. It therefore refuses to derive the "concrete fullness of the diverse itself" from one principle and to systematize it conceptually,<sup>183</sup> and it no longer claims to have at its disposal a theoretical framework that would remain untouched by the diversity of symbolizations and would be capable of grounding their unidirectional development.<sup>184</sup> In a positive sense, this critique is totally oriented towards the goal of exhibiting "in fullness and in context, in the particularity of specifically diverse symbolic expressions, [...] the unity and the fullness of the world, of reality" (*Disposition 1917*, p. 31).

Thus, from the outset Cassirer's "Philosophy of the Symbolic" walks the fine line between making arguments about the symbolic in general, on the one hand, and demonstrating the concrete diversity of specific symbolizations, on the other. This balancing act, in other words, runs the risk of failure both in the sublation of this diversity into one unitary, logical system and in a mere juxtaposition of completely independent symbol-forms, as Cassirer also makes particularly clear in an appeal to the tradition of metaphysics. Namely, Cassirer orients his "metaphysics" on the goal of preserving the "concrete fullness of the diverse itself" in terms of its own heterogeneity, and he therefore relates it to the "various symbolic levels of knowledge, art, philosophy, religion" in which the symbolic is realized. At the same time, however, he emphasizes on Sheet 13 of his records that his understanding of a "metaphysics of the symbolic," as in the case of "the logical," "relativizes" the claim of each symbol-form, thus setting it in relation to the other forms and in this context limiting it: "How this metaphysics – on our view – simultaneously comprehends and justifies all previous symbolic

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**182** "[T]he path through these symbolic levels is synonymous for us with the goal. We do not know any other goal, a goal as an absolute end point, given that what matters for us is the process of self-renewing and increasing life itself" (*Disposition 1917*, p. 30).

**183** Cf. Cassirer's profiling of "critical" in contrast to "absolute Idealism" in *ECW 4*, pp. 348 ff. Möckel (2004, pp. 269–272) seems to me to position the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* too closely to Hegel's dialectic, even if he does realize that Cassirer fundamentally rejects the "systematic deducibility of his symbolic forms from any original concept" (Möckel 2004, p. 271).

**184** For a similar conclusion with respect to Cassirer's study in the history of philosophy on the Enlightenment, cf. Renz (2003, pp. 115 f. and 124 f.).

levels (language, myth, art, science) and, on the other hand, nevertheless also relativizes them once again, – that emerges perhaps most clearly in its position on the logical” (Sheet 13, p. 1).

The “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” will thus work out the forms of symbolization in their diversity and simultaneously consider them in their context. It will even, as Cassirer explains on Sheet 7, inquire into their “totality,” in which context it has to maintain and preserve the boundaries between various symbolizations: “In contrast, we are seeking here the immanent critique: the positive determination of what is specific in every form of understanding, life, and expression and how they complement one another in pursuit of totality” (Sheet 7, p. 3). And he continues after a thin, horizontal dividing line: “This ‘metaphysics of the symbolic’ would thus constitute, as it were, the universal grammar of symbolic expression – while in the particular expressions (art, myth, science) only the particular idioms would be visible. The relative legitimacy of these idioms and of each one of them individually is ensured by the ‘philosophy of the symbolic’; but this philosophy simultaneously wants to prevent the indiscriminate spillover of one idiom into another (e.g., from the language of science into that of myth). To this extent, the ‘limits’ need to be demarcated critically” (Sheet 7, p. 4).

Consequently, Cassirer, both in emphasizing the “particularity of the specific-diverse symbol-expressions” as well as with his view on the “totality” that is formed and articulated thereby, breaks away from the systems of idealism. The reason is that, with his insistence on “critical” demarcation among the forms of symbolization and the necessity of their “immanent critique,” he is once again referring to the Kantian tradition. Cassirer’s reflections on a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” thus reinforce the thesis that I had already formulated with the help of Cassirer’s efforts towards a “system of exact sciences”: the concept of the symbolic, as well as the system of the forms of symbolization, should be viewed on the horizon of a reflective approach, not a deductive one. In the context of the “metaphysics of the symbolic,” however, it now becomes even clearer that Cassirer’s reflection on the symbolic and the diversity of its forms in the Kantian tradition must for that reason also begin with the complex, historical fact of the diverse forms of specific symbolizations.

On Sheet 39, under the heading “Symbol-Forms (in General),” Cassirer thus does not only insist on the fact that the historical genesis of the symbolic should not be understood as a one-dimensional progress that can be derived from the concept of the symbolic. He also infers from that fact the necessity of accepting the givenness of the diversity of concrete symbolizations factually and of being content with the task of reflecting on them, a task which, furthermore, must be accompanied by a description of phenomena. I will cite the sheet in its entirety:

“These forms do not constitute for us here any dialectical series, such that we would undertake to derive them from one another deductively according to one determinate conceptual principle... Where this occurs, as in Hegel, there is already one characteristic symbol-form (the form of apodeixis, of ‘logic’) that is made unilaterally into the norm of the whole. If this is avoided, then nothing remains to be done other than to accept the forms, as must happen in any case, first in their purely factual givenness, and then to analyze them ‘transcendentally.’ We do not deduce the one from the others; but we seek to identify descriptively their unity, their connection, their progress, and their conflict. For this purpose, we turn to the history of spirit: in art, in religion, in language, in myth, in science” (Sheet 39, p. 1). Taking the place of Hegelian “deduction,” Cassirer thus calls in “reflection,” which has to “accept” the forms “first in their purely factual givenness, and then to analyze them ‘transcendentally.’”

The way in which Cassirer connects philosophical reflection back to factual givenness is once again reminiscent of the demands of Kant’s critical philosophy. Transcendental reflection, however, takes a new turn in the context of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic, because it is no longer limited to the field of knowledge and cannot be content with presupposing several secure, universally valid cognitions.<sup>185</sup> Rather, the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” is supposed to deal with the historical diversity of the symbolic both alongside and beyond Hegel, such that it must presuppose nothing less than the cultural and historical richness of our experience of reality in all its forms. This richness, of course, is not given without further efforts; it must first be explored and described. In this sense, philosophical reflection no longer makes do without description, a point from which Cassirer will draw a conclusion that will be a decisive characteristic of his work on the project of a philosophy of the symbolic and his publications on the philosophy of culture: philosophy cannot carry out the description of the diversity of symbolizations by itself, but must depend for this purpose on the cultural sciences that research the history of various views of reality in science and art, myth and language empirically. Cassirer’s philosophy of culture is therefore not completely unacquainted with an anti-idealist impulse when it appeals to the cultural sciences and bases its philosophical reflection on their historical and empirical findings without also laying claim to a purely conceptual-deductive system.

This proximity of Cassirer’s “Philosophy of the Symbolic” to the cultural sciences, however, entails substantial challenges.<sup>186</sup> Only two are mentioned here,

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. *CPR*, B 12–21 and *PFM*, 4/284 f.

<sup>186</sup> This proximity has been little appreciated in systematic terms, and even more rarely seen as an expression of Cassirer’s philosophical program; as an exception, cf. the hints by Orth (2011, p. 121).

which have already appeared in outline in the last pages and which will be discussed in more detail in the two subsequent chapters. On the one hand, the generalized structure and more specific implementation of Kantian reflection beginning with the empirical research of the cultural sciences will hardly be able to avoid developing the model of transcendental reflection further with an eye towards the relationship between universal and specific, *a priori* and empirical conditions. In consequence, this approach raises questions concerning the self-understanding of a philosophical concept-formation that is essentially based on research in the cultural sciences and their empirical findings with the aim of substituting for deduction an interplay of “description” and “reflection.” On the other hand, Cassirer’s “Philosophy of the Symbolic” will refer to a multiplicity of symbolizations, whose givenness cannot be presupposed without question, but which rather constantly rely on empirical descriptions by the various cultural sciences. Philosophical reflection, therefore, is constantly faced with the practical challenge of justifying the facts from which it originates, in full awareness of research in the cultural sciences and taking into account research discussions that are often controversial.

The points on the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” thus lead Cassirer into the heart of the systematic and methodological challenges of his future philosophy of culture. It is all the more surprising, however, that Cassirer will quickly abandon this title of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic.” He no longer brings it up at all in the published writings after 1917, where instead the critical use of the word with respect to “ontological” or “realistic metaphysics” continues to predominate (*ECW* 17, p. 201). The editors of the outlines for the so-called fourth volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which appeared in 1995 under the title *On the Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms [Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen]*, thus had good reasons for assuming that a “philosophy of symbolic forms [is] explicitly the opposite of all metaphysics” and that Cassirer only “came later to a positive concept of metaphysics as well” (*ECN* 1, p. 299, editorial note).<sup>187</sup> In light of the records, in contrast, it is clear that the title of metaphysics does not emerge alongside Cassirer’s subsequent reflection on the foundations of the philosophy of culture at the end of the 1920s. Rather, the project of a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” was bound up with a “metaphysics” from its very beginnings, since it was supposed to comprehend all forms of reality in the context

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**187** The example reference is to *ECW* 13, p. 106. Because of this assumption, and based on the corresponding title, the editors thus also put Sheets 13, 43, 91, and 229 – cf. *ECN* 1, pp. 261–265 and 269–271, as well as the discovery from the archive; cf. *ECN* 1, pp. 295 f. – and thus records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” from 1917 or 1918 in the context of the notes on the planned “fourth volume.”

of their constitutive mediation and thereby to encompass the various forms of truth even beyond knowledge. This fact demonstrates the independence that pervades Cassirer's working records, since they do not necessarily continue into the published texts. They occasionally risk ventures that either never or only much later reach publication. And they occasionally take up a more straightforward or polemical position than usually expected from Cassirer's thought and works.

Why Cassirer gave up the name of a "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" can hardly be answered without speculation. Perhaps it emerged in the progress of the project that the pluralistic mission of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is simply all too much opposed to a traditional definition of a metaphysics in general, to which Cassirer is still attached in the last section of the *Disposition*.<sup>188</sup> And no less plausible seems the conjecture that the concept of metaphysics became less significant for Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic to the extent that another concept becomes more important, a concept whose absence may be striking to many contemporary readers of Cassirer's records. Namely, Cassirer's endeavors towards a philosophy of the symbolic are not governed by the key point that in contemporary discussion is inseparably bound up with what is often considered to be his magnum opus, the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: in the *Disposition* as well as throughout the sheets, there is no talk of a philosophy of culture, and the keyword "culture" is mentioned only in passing, if at all.<sup>189</sup> This fact might already have been quite surprising in 1917. The buzzword of "culture" had long been on every tongue, had gained a tremendous amount of currency, and had been made relevant by, among others, Georg Simmel, Cassirer's first "teacher."<sup>190</sup> At the same time, the program of a "philosophy of culture" had

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**188** To what extent the traditional title of metaphysics also tempts Cassirer to emphasize the universality and unitary operation of the symbolic is made clear by way of example on Sheet 34 with the title "Symbolics (in General)": "Metaphysics of the symbol-forms – justification of the title – just as previously metaphysics was supposed to be the doctrine of beings [*Seienden*] per se, of  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \tilde{\eta}\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ , so it is here supposed to be that of the symbol-form per se, not of this one or that one (interaction between ego and reality!)" (Sheet 34, p. 4).

**189** The sole mention of the keyword culture that stood out to me reads: "Character of human culture consists generally in the transformation of the external physical world into an organ of the will and of spiritual expression" (Sheet 34, p. 3). Subsequently, Cassirer touches on the use of tools and ultimately refers to Ludwig Noiré's *The Tool and its Importance for the History of Human Development* [*Das Werkzeug und seine Bedeutung für die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit*] from 1880.

**190** On the conceptual history of culture, philosophy of culture, and cultural science, cf. Perpeet (1976, in particular pp. 44–49, as well as the supplementary account in 1984, in particular pp. 378–385). Perpeet's account, and chiefly his interpretation of Cassirer's philosophy of culture, in which he, in keeping with the usual cliché from Neo-Kantianism, diagnoses a "scientific

already begun its tremendous career, to the extent that Paul Natorp, in a rejoinder to the relevant claims, was already claiming several years previously that the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism had been an endeavor towards a philosophy of culture since its beginnings.<sup>191</sup> Cassirer, in contrast, does not take up this buzzword in the work on his new project and focuses instead on the correlation between subject and object, the “interaction between ego and reality” that has its conditions in the symbolic (Sheet 34, p. 4).<sup>192</sup> Helmut Kuhn, therefore, was already denying in 1949 that the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* actually deals with a philosophy of culture in any dedicated way<sup>193</sup> – an objection that might come up for discussion once again specifically by reference to the *Disposition* from 1917.

The proximity of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” to the cultural sciences that has been demonstrated, however, suggests a less far-reaching thesis: Cassirer takes refuge in the concept of culture when he unshackles Kant’s transcendental reflection from subjective conditions and, based on the insights of the cultur-

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impact,” seems to me to be tendentious; on Cassirer, cf. Perpeet (1976, pp. 53–56, as well as, finally with a more balanced approach, 1982).

**191** “If one tells us that the *philosophy of culture* poses an important new challenge, we can but answer that, from the start, we have viewed and described the philosophy of Kant – not to mention the philosophy of the transcendental method – as philosophy of culture, which we, embracing Kant’s initiative, wish to work through in a more strict and consistent manner. We do not consider this philosophy of culture to be in opposition to philosophy of nature or natural science” (Natorp 2015, p. 193). According to Renz (2002, pp. 67 f.), the explicit description “philosophy of culture” is found in Natorp and Cohen, but by no means earlier, at least explicitly. **192** This theme of the “interaction between ego and reality” is also found in later texts; cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 139–183, here pp. 153 and 156, and *ECN* 1, pp. 58–60. According to the findings of Guido Kreis, it proves to be true that the “central question of the philosophy of symbolic forms” is aimed at the “forms of mediation and development of ‘reality’” (Kreis 2009, p. 172); for detail on “world-development,” cf. Kreis (2009, pp. 201–207). In her study on the philosophy of culture in the Marburg school, Ursula Renz also emphasizes the “relation between human being and world” that is thought of by Cassirer as “reciprocal effect,” and she thereby demonstrates continuities with Cohen and Natorp; cf. Renz (2002, pp. 216–221, in particular p. 220). In spite of this continuity, however, she takes the common view that this relationship comes into focus only through subsequent reflection on the foundations of the philosophy of culture: “Strictly understood, therefore, the reduction of the *PSF* to a theory of the relation between human being and world is an explication that can only be justified beginning with the third and fourth volume of the work” (Renz 2002, p. 250). In light of the *Disposition* from 1917, this assessment must be revised: it is evident that this relation is rather located, albeit certainly in an anthropological context, at the beginning of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”

**193** Namely, Kuhn (1949, pp. 547–549 and 564) advocates the interesting thesis that Cassirer was not at all dealing with a philosophy of culture, but rather with a first philosophy, with being qua being. At least with respect to the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” in the early records from 1917 and 1918, this thesis attains a certain plausibility.



al sciences, simultaneously emphasizes the diversity of external, historical, and empirical forms of mediation for that “interaction between ego and reality.” Thus, he may indeed introduce the concept of culture from the perspective of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic.” He would, however, speak of culture primarily as a result of the inevitability of philosophical reflection being based on the cultural sciences and their empirical findings. Without the insights and descriptions of the cultural sciences, namely, the “unity and the fullness of the world, of reality” would scarcely be accessible to philosophy, and reflection on the universal conditions of the symbolic and the specific conditions of symbolizations would lack an appropriate starting point (*Disposition* 1917, p. 31). This systematic proximity to the cultural sciences can also be detected, we might speculate, in the programmatic self-understanding of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as a philosophy of culture. In contrast, Cassirer abandoned the title of a “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” rather quickly.

## Turnings towards the World: A Brief Comparison of Cassirer and Dilthey

In going through the *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” and in particular in discussing the “metaphysics” that concludes it, what Ralf Konersmann demonstrated about the climate surrounding the philosophy of culture around 1900, and in particular about Cassirer’s philosophy, proves to be true: the turn away from Hegel’s philosophy has as its goal a turn towards the cultural world, towards a variety of symbols and objects in terms of their own peculiar significance.<sup>194</sup> Only by overcoming the Hegelian system can we get a view of “the diversity of culture free from hierarchical deductions,”<sup>195</sup> as Birgit Recki puts it, or more specifically “the unity and the fullness of the world” or the “concrete fullness of the diverse itself” of which Cassirer’s *Disposition* speaks. Such an approach is characteristic of the climate of the philosophy of culture in the first half of the 20th century, and so it is easy to trace parallels to other philosophers of the period. Georg Simmel similarly refers in the context of a critique of Hegel to “the fullness of appearance,”<sup>196</sup> but even Wilhelm Dilthey occasion-

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Konersmann (2006, pp. 128–148, in particular pp. 138–147).

<sup>195</sup> Recki (2004, p. 70).

<sup>196</sup> With this formulation, Georg Simmel is also, in his *Main Problems of Philosophy* [*Hauptprobleme der Philosophie*] from 1910, taking a stand against Hegel’s “formula of thesis, antithesis, synthesis”: “Meanwhile, apart from the profundity of speculation that unfolds in this particular tendency, that formula is nevertheless an unspeakably poor fit as a world law. It is, on the one

ally mentions the “individual fullness of the world”<sup>197</sup> or the “fullness of life”<sup>198</sup> when he seeks to distance himself from the constructions of the metaphysical tradition and Hegel’s philosophy of history. The question of whether this critique of Hegel’s philosophy is justified can remain open here, as can the question of whether there is actually a break at all or whether instead there prevails a hidden continuity.<sup>199</sup> What is important at this point is primarily the fact that Cassirer finds himself to be in complete accord with a widespread contemporary trend when he turns away from Hegel’s philosophy of history in order to carry out a turning towards the world in its own peculiar diversity and concretion. Cassirer, however, gives a particular shape to the “unity and [...] fullness of the world,” because he does not merely refer to the diversity of world-understandings and symbolizations, but rather will also rely in that context on empirical research in the cultural sciences.

A brief comparison with the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, with which Cassirer had likely already been well acquainted, is particularly informative in this respect.<sup>200</sup> Dilthey perceived the post-Hegelian situation of philosophy earlier than others and made it the starting point of his thought, which notably associated the concept of life with the promise of greater philosophical concretion. He thereby begins essentially with the discovery that the development of the sciences no longer complies with the claims of idealist philosophy, and in particular no longer with the Hegelian system. His *Introduction to the Human Sciences* from 1883 is marked by the impression of the success and the “emancipation” of the natural sciences, which had taken their methodological reflection into their own hands and which had for some time no longer felt themselves to be in need of philosophical justification (Dilthey 1989, p. 47).

Dilthey defines this development historically in terms of the break with the epoch of “metaphysics,” which since antiquity had been promising to organize knowledge of the world under the presupposition of abstract certainties and to justify various approaches to the material by deriving them from the highest

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hand, too general and too weak, but on the other hand too narrow and too dictatorial to contain within itself the fullness of appearance” (Simmel 1996, p. 77).

**197** Thus writes Dilthey in a journal entry from 1861, which is quoted by Jung (1996 p. 20); cf. Misch (1933, p. 153), as part of a collection of letters and journals compiled by Clara Misch, née Dilthey.

**198** Dilthey (2002, p. 169). The passages cited here and in what follows belong to the parts of the volume that were already published in 1910.

**199** That the critique of Hegel does not indicate a break either in Dilthey or in Cassirer is the thesis of Scholtz (2003).

**200** Cf. Möckel (2005, pp. 25 and 35–42), as well as, beyond the aspects that will be focused on in what follows, Leinkauf (2003, in particular pp. 7–17) and Schmitz (2006).

principles.<sup>201</sup> This model of philosophy, on Dilthey's view, came to an end in particular with the establishment, the methodological independence, and the increasing differentiation of the "particular human sciences" (Dilthey 1989, p. 162). The sheer diversity even among the disciplines of the human sciences alone, disciplines which, as in the particular case of history, no longer wanted to subordinate themselves to philosophical standards, can hardly continue to be forced into the synoptic ordering of the idealist systems.<sup>202</sup> In the 19th century, there arose a variety of disciplines that philosophy could no longer regulate, as Hegel still claimed to be able to do. This development, as noted by Herbert Schnädelbach, thus lead to an "identity-crisis of German philosophy after Hegel, which still continues even today," and which provoked a wide variety of reactions and innovative conceptions – including various forms of turning towards the world (Schnädelbach 1984, p. ix).<sup>203</sup>

This turning towards the world, which is characteristic of many new philosophical approaches around 1900, therefore, is not merely a result of a "socio-historical reality" that is becoming increasingly differentiated, but rather takes place in the context of the differentiation of disciplines in the human or cultural sciences. What philosophy sees in this situation is, first and foremost, a challenge.<sup>204</sup> Dilthey's *Introduction*, however, simultaneously casts the differentiation of the sciences in a positive light, which is also quite illuminating with respect to Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences. Dilthey has as his goal, first and foremost, the task of securing the human sciences against premature methodological assimilations into the natural sciences under the banner of positivism,<sup>205</sup> and he therefore makes an attempt at providing a foundation for the

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**201** "Philosophers have attempted to discover the overall articulation of those sciences that have socio-historical reality as their subject matter [. . .] Insofar as they sought to derive this system from metaphysical principles, it suffered the fate of all metaphysics" (Dilthey 1989, p. 74). Cf. also Dilthey (1989, pp. 176 ff., as well as 1962, p. 224). [The English translation of Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, which is part of his *Selected Works*, omits a great deal of the historical discussion in the original, including the latter reference. -Trans.]

**202** On the emancipation of the disciplines and the changes in our understanding of science, cf. Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 66–95, in particular pp. 66 f.); on the role of history and the turn away from Hegel's philosophy of history, cf. Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 33–65).

**203** With a view to the understanding of science that changed under the pressure of the success of the empirical disciplines in terms of research, cf. also Schnädelbach 1984, pp. 95 ff.

**204** Cf. Konersmann (2009).

**205** Cf. Dilthey (1989, pp. 47–51). For an introduction to this situation, cf. Riedel (1970, pp. 13–22).

disciplines of the human sciences,<sup>206</sup> thereby contributing, among other things, to the establishment of the term “human sciences.”<sup>207</sup> Beyond that, however, he emphasizes the significance of the differentiation of the disciplines of the human sciences from one another: only by means of their differentiation, namely, is it possible for the human sciences to account for the diverse reality of modern society. The reason is that this reality is, for its part, characterized by a “process of [...] differentiation”<sup>208</sup> that renders impossible all “knowledge of the concrete totality of socio-historical reality” (Dilthey 1989, p. 163). A reality that is complex and diverse in its own right can only be dealt with by way of the entire context of the “particular sciences” (Dilthey 1989, p. 47).<sup>209</sup>

This thesis opens up an illuminating view on Cassirer’s “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” As shown, Cassirer begins from the fact that the diversity of symbolizations only becomes comprehensible when the attempt to derive them systematically from one foundational concept according to Hegel’s model is given up. His assumption that this diversity is only accessible to philosophy to the extent that it can be based on descriptions taken from the empirical research of the cultural sciences can now, with the help of Dilthey’s observations, also be justified by the fact that the diversity and complexity of our differentiated world-understandings can only be dealt with adequately in collaboration with various disciplines in the human or cultural sciences. Cassirer’s programmatic answer to the challenge of the post-Hegelian situation of philosophy, and in particular of the cultural sciences, thus consists in seeking out interdisciplinary collaboration with various disciplines and in making use of their empirical research: the empirical descriptions of the cultural sciences are supposed to represent the point

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**206** In his own words, Dilthey demands that “we must provide an epistemological grounding of the human sciences, justify and support their independent formation, and once and for all put an end to the idea that their principles and their methods should be subordinated to those of the natural sciences” (Dilthey 1989, pp. 158f.). Dilthey also continues to pursue this epistemological program in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* from 1910; cf. Dilthey (2002, pp. 139f. and 142f.).

**207** Cf. Dilthey (1989, pp. 56–59). On Rickert’s vote for the alternative term “cultural sciences,” cf. Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 56–58), and on Dilthey’s counter-arguments, cf. Makkreel (1969, pp. 423–431).

**208** Dilthey (1989, p. 90). On the onset of this process in the early modern period, cf. Dilthey (1989, pp. 185–192). Here, Dilthey develops an influential narrative of modernization and differentiation that is closely connected to the emergence of sociology and which underwent one of its most advanced elaborations in Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory; on that point, cf. Hahn (1999, pp. 12–18).

**209** Cf. also Dilthey (1989, pp. 162–165 and 173–176).

of departure for philosophical reflection in order to do as much justice as possible to the complexity of a world that is quite diverse in its own right.

Cassirer also concedes this descriptive use of the cultural and human sciences to empirical psychology, provided that it gives up its epistemological claims and instead attempts to describe our experience. On the basis of the Neo-Kantian assumption of the correlation between subject and object, Cassirer had thus already been searching in *Substance and Function* for a “psychology of relations” that would rediscover the structures of the known in the process of knowing. Similarly, the *Disposition* from 1917 begins with a “Psychology of the Symbolic,” which is first and foremost interested in the role of the symbolic and of representation for the structure of conscious life. Here, as before, the psychology of association stands at the center of Cassirer’s critique; but at the same time the interest in a descriptive instead of a reductionistically explanatory psychology is plain to see. For this reason, Cassirer will draw on gestalt psychology extensively in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,<sup>210</sup> and he will furthermore seek out points of intersection with psychology in his outline “Concerning Basic Phenomena” [“Über Basisphänomene”], where he also expresses his appreciation of Dilthey’s theory of lived experience and expression in this context.<sup>211</sup> Cassirer expresses just how important the descriptions of psychology are, on his view, in an opening address at the convention of the German Society for Psychology in 1931, in which he first recapitulates the psychologism controversy and then suggests new, productive relationships between “psychology and philosophy” that are in alignment with the “psychology of the symbolic”: “The system of ‘objective spirit,’ the development of which belongs among the fundamental and primary tasks of philosophy, demands over and over again attention to those problems of ‘subjective spirit’ with which psychology deals” (*ECW* 18, p. 150). And he continues: “a philosophy that, for its part, would desire forcefully to cut the tie that binds it to psychology would always, in so doing, run into the danger of becoming, as it were, a ‘philosophy without a body.’ It would eventually lose itself in abstract speculations and lose its view of immediate phenomenal reality” (*ECW* 18, pp. 150 f.). This opening address should probably not be overestimated in terms of its systematic significance; however, it does strike to the heart of the fact that Cassirer considers collaboration with psychology to be necessary and fruitful when it gives up its pretensions to psychologistic expla-

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**210** On Cassirer’s reading of gestalt psychology, cf. once again the secondary literature cited above on p. 48, note 55.

**211** Cf. *ECN* 1, pp. 138–150, and on Dilthey in particular *ECN* 1, pp. 159–161.

nations and turns towards the task of describing conscious life and its structures in the context of cultural reality.<sup>212</sup>

Dilthey's relationship to psychology differs from Cassirer's reference to psychology in strictly descriptive terms, but by no means as markedly as it might seem at first glance. Dilthey is seeking his own philosophical answer to the post-Hegelian challenge of philosophy first and foremost in epistemological reflection on this development, and he carries it out as a psychological description of the factual processes of knowledge. Alongside "self-contemplation" on the historical development of the sciences and philosophy in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*,<sup>213</sup> there is thus a complementary epistemological reflection and a "study of how the specific task of the human sciences conditions their research activities" (Dilthey 1989, p. 97). In that context, Dilthey is attempting to describe the factual processes of knowledge in the human sciences and claims for himself, instead of merely transferring standards taken from the natural sciences as in positivism, the "standpoint of experience and of unprejudiced empirical inquiry as distinct from empiricism" (Dilthey 1989, p. 130).<sup>214</sup>

Dilthey's psychology should be seen as quite nuanced in this respect, and it by no means abruptly excludes cultural and social context. It understands itself, on the one hand, as a "descriptive science"<sup>215</sup> that conceives of the subject as this "being that wills, feels, and thinks," i. e., as the "complete human being" (Dilthey 1989, p. 50). On the other hand, however, it remains conscious of the fact that it considers only "the individual who has been singled out from the living context of socio-historical reality" (Dilthey 1989, p. 82). Its object thus represents a methodological abstraction, because "[n]either in experience nor through inference can psychology find man as he is apart from interactions with society" (Dilthey 1989, p. 82).<sup>216</sup> Dilthey therefore does not aspire to any reductionist foundation of knowledge and society in the psychology of the individual, but rather constantly relates the universal and "uniform conditions" that he views ground-

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**212** For similarly programmatic commitments to collaboration between philosophy and psychology, cf. *ECW* 18, pp. 115–122 and 290, as well as *ECN* 8, p. 180.

**213** For a formulation of the program, cf. Dilthey (1989, pp. 51f.), and for its implementation cf. Dilthey (1989, pp. 223ff.).

**214** In Dilthey (1989, p. 57), Dilthey puts it as follows: "The empirical method requires that we establish the value of the particular procedures necessary for inquiry on the basis of the subject matter of the human sciences and in a historical-critical manner. The nature of knowledge in the human sciences must be explicated by observing the full course of human development."

**215** Cf. Dilthey (1989, p. 84), as well as, on the tradition of "explanatory psychology" from which Dilthey distinguishes himself, Dilthey (1962, pp. 375–378, and 1924a, pp. 139–240).

**216** On this point, cf. also Dilthey (2002, pp. 156ff.)

ed in the mental nature of humankind to the “particular conditions” that are given in the socio-historical situation.<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, Dilthey’s areas of focus and points of emphasis shift over the years from a psychology of lived experience and inner experience to a theory of individual expression and cultural products, as Cassirer himself was already observing pointedly by the end of the 1920s.<sup>218</sup> This new emphasis was probably inspired, as in the case of Cassirer, by the aesthetic studies in which Dilthey dealt, among other figures, with Schiller and Goethe’s view of poetic expression as symbol and form.<sup>219</sup> He therefore increasingly begins, as does Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic, with the necessary externalization or expression of inner lived experience and ultimately advances to a conception of “objective spirit” that was of central significance for the nascent philosophy of culture.<sup>220</sup> He stole this slogan for a post-Hegelian philosophy specifically from Hegel’s philosophy of history,<sup>221</sup> in which context he at least implicitly seizes on the development of a “non-Hegelian concept of ‘objective’ spirit”<sup>222</sup> in the early ethnic psychology of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal.<sup>223</sup> What we are dealing with

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**217** Dilthey (1924b, pp. 103–241, here p. 126). The quoted phrases refer here at first to the conditions of a judgment of taste, but beyond that are also apparently characteristic of the “universal relationship between the psychological and the historical” (Dilthey 1924b, p. 126). Accordingly, Dilthey supplements his initially psychological “foundation of poetics” with a “literary-historical empiricism” (Dilthey 1924b, p. 197). On that point, cf. also Dilthey (1924b, pp. 201–203, as well as, with a critique of Hegel, pp. 228 ff.).

**218** Cf. *ECW* 17, pp. 342–359, here pp. 349 f., as well as *ECN* 1, pp. 113–195, here pp. 159–162. On the now-central triad of lived experience, expression, and understanding, cf. by way of example Dilthey (2002, pp. 108 f.), and for more detail on this development, Jung (1996, pp. 87–90 and 97–100). The question of how this shift should be interpreted more precisely can remain open here. Against the simple thesis of an increasing turn away from psychology speaks not only the fact that Dilthey already occasionally refers in the *Introduction* to the “product[s]” (Dilthey 1989, p. 102) and the “objective realities” that are “shaped” by the “human spirit” (Dilthey 1989, p. 110). In addition, Schnädelbach (1984, pp. 123–129) has argued that Dilthey’s changed attitude towards psychology is grounded less in a shift in his own position than by the contemporary development of the dominance of explanatory psychology.

**219** Cf. Dilthey (1924b, pp. 116 f. and 187). This is also emphasized by Schmitz (2006, pp. 72–77); with a view to the significance of Goethe both for Dilthey and for Cassirer, cf. also Schmitz (2006, pp. 302–316).

**220** Cf. Dilthey (2002, pp. 168–174), and for clarification Jung (1996, pp. 138–156) and Schmitz (2006, pp. 82–91).

**221** Cf. Dilthey (2002, pp. 170–174).

**222** Cf. Köhnke (2003, p. XV).

**223** Cf. Lessing (1985, especially pp. 67–82), who admittedly emphasizes primarily Dilthey’s disassociation from the presumed aspiration to explanation of the early ethnic psychology and thereby relegates the simultaneous points of overlap to the background. He only mentions at

in this context is an open, searching concept, as part of which has been assembled the whole spectrum of cultural products and their tradition, which it might seem could only be preserved on this side or that of Hegel's idealism: "Hegel constructs metaphysically; we analyze the given" (Dilthey 2002, p. 172). What we are to understand as the given in this context is not identified specifically, and Dilthey's hermeneutics and Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* chose different possibilities here.<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, they share a methodological point of departure, the fact that the human being and his lived experiences must be understood in the context of his externalizations and objectivizations in all their richness. It would therefore be quite possible to bring Dilthey's descriptive psychology, to the extent that it is accompanied by a hermeneutic theory of objective culture, into dialog with Cassirer's "Philosophy of the Symbolic," inasmuch as it contains a "psychology" as a necessary constituent part.

The decisive difference between Dilthey's and Cassirer's approach thus does not, for the purposes of the argument of the present study, lie in their differing relationship to psychology, particularly since both view psychology in the context of the differentiation of the modern world and of the human sciences that research it. However, Dilthey and Cassirer do define the role of philosophy with respect to the newly differentiated disciplines and the consequences of the collapse of the philosophical aspiration to a system in Hegel's sense in different ways. Dilthey is first and foremost seeking an answer by way of epistemological reflection. With the "critique of historical reason," following Kant, he devises an epistemology of the human sciences and connects it to a redefinition of the historical character of reason.<sup>225</sup> Cassirer, in contrast, does not move the human and cultural sciences towards the perspective of the philosophy of science in the

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the end that Dilthey is probably following Lazarus with his talk of "objective spirit," but that he is not highlighting this connection. In reaction to Dilthey, however, the mark of ethnic psychology on the concept was taken into account early on; cf. Frankenberg (1914, here in particular pp. 68f.). Cf. also the overview of the contemporary discussion of early ethnic psychology in the second part of the essay.

**224** On this point, cf. Makkreel (1997). Makkreel justifies his observations by the fact that Dilthey developed "primarily the reflective, descriptive, Cassirer, in contrast, primarily the regulative, explanatory view" of Kant's relevance and the activity of the power of judgment (Makkreel 1997, p. 150). He relates this difference chiefly to the identification of cultural products and not, as I will do in the following chapter, to the self-understanding of philosophical reflection in the context of the cultural sciences. However, the argument seems to me to be quite questionable in the context of Cassirer.

**225** Cf. the famous passage in Dilthey (1989, p. 165).



“Philosophy of the Symbolic.”<sup>226</sup> Rather, as in the later *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, he refers to the cultural sciences in order to incorporate the diversity of symbolizations and their concrete specifications, about which we are informed by, for example, research in linguistics, religious studies, and aesthetics.<sup>227</sup> He seeks engagement with the cultural sciences because they grant access to the “concrete fullness of the diverse itself” in their disciplinary differentiation and make the diversity of the symbolic available descriptively.<sup>228</sup> Cassirer’s answer to the challenge presented to philosophy by the cultural sciences therefore begins from a different perspective than that of Dilthey. Instead of drawing up a theory of knowledge in the human sciences, he makes use of the differentiation of the cultural sciences in order to be able, by means of their descriptive diversity, to reflect on the various symbolic conditions of world-understandings that are complex and differentiated in their own right.

This connection between reflection on the philosophy of culture and description in the cultural sciences can be thought of as characteristic for Cassirer’s attempt at a world-bearing thought.<sup>229</sup> However, it by no means guarantees a

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**226** With reference to later texts and discussing Cassirer’s difference from the approaches of Rickert or Windelband, cf. also Orth (2011, pp. 123f.).

**227** Cassirer identifies this shift quite clearly in the first lines of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: “The first draft of this work, whose first volume I am here submitting, goes back to the investigations that are summed up in my book *Substance and Function* (Berlin, 1910). When I attempted to apply my findings of these investigations, which focused essentially on the structure of mathematical and natural scientific thinking, to the problems that concerned the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*], it became increasingly clear to me that the general theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*], in its traditional approach and limitations, was not sufficient to provide an adequate methodological foundation for the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]. If such a foundation were to be acquired, then the plan of this theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*] would need to be fundamentally broadened. Rather than investigating only the general presuppositions of the scientific cognizing of the world, it was equally necessary to differentiate the different basic forms of “understanding” [*Verstehen*] of the world and apprehend each one of them as sharply as possible in their distinctive tendency and spiritual form. Only when such a “morphology” [*Formenlehre*] of spirit had been established, at least in general outline, could we hope to ground a clearer methodological view and a more secure principle of grounding for the individual disciplines of the human sciences” (*ECW* 11, VII).

**228** Cf. the programmatic explanation in *ECN* 12, pp. 12f., as well as *ECN* 8, pp. 117–134, in particular the conclusion on pp. 132–134.

**229** It is significant that this connection of transcendental reflection and empirical description is distinguished from that of Husserlian phenomenology. The reason is that Cassirer is referring to description *in the cultural sciences*, because he sees the conditions of experience unfolding in the cultural world, and its subject, therefore, is from the outset part of a world that is diverse and differentiated in its own right. Neither is the case in Husserl, since he is returning to an intentional subject in order subsequently to describe references to the world and its structures from

method that would still be worth following. Rather, the systematic challenges of this approach should not be underestimated, which is particularly true with a view to the language of reflection. Up to now, I have more or less explicitly oriented this concept on transcendental reflection in the sense used by Kant, which, at least according to its depiction by the Neo-Kantians, begins with something given. In the case of Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic, however, we are not dealing with any simple fact, but rather with the diversity and unity of the symbolic, which can only be accounted for with the help of the various disciplines of the cultural sciences and which will unfold through a process of sophisticated empirical research. Any philosophical reflection that takes account of this situation will no longer be able to aim from the outset at a homogeneous set of conditions. Rather, it must take account of both universal and specific conditions in order to preserve and to emphasize the diversity and specificity of the givens that it takes as its starting point.

The question at hand is thus that of how transcendental reflection, following in the footsteps of Kant, can be developed further, in such a way that it is able to stand in agreement with the idea that pervades the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" and which was the focus of this first chapter. How, therefore, should we conceive of a reflection that is valid both for the universality of the symbolic as well as for its specification into symbolic forms and its further internal differentiation? In the following chapter, I would like to attempt to demonstrate that Cassirer answers this question by appealing to a central problem from Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which he was once again reading with greater care in the years prior to 1917. Whereas his studies in the history of

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the perspective of the immanent operation of intentional experience. This description sets itself in opposition to any scientific knowing, because the subject in this sense is indeed related constitutively to the world, but is not embedded in a world that precedes it. On the difference between Cassirer's philosophy of culture and phenomenological description of the given, cf. also Fetz (1988, pp. 170f.), as well as Skidelsky (2008, p. 102). As a result, it seems to me to be imprecise to characterize Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic as "cultural phenomenology"; cf. Renz (2002, pp. 203f. and 209). Ursula Renz nevertheless makes clear the connection between Cassirer's reading of the cultural sciences and the question, already nascent in Cohen and Natorp, of the fact with which a philosophy of culture is able to begin if it is to have a transcendental aim; cf. Renz (2002, pp. 53–62). In my opinion, however, she underestimates the aspiration of Cassirer's point of departure: "Much more banal than Cohen, he sees the facts of culture as being simply assembled in the pre-given material of studies in the human sciences" (Renz 2002, p. 60, footnote omitted). Ernst Wolfgang Orth too seems to me to present Cassirer's dismissal of phenomenological description with insufficient clarity; cf. Orth (2004, pp. 305f.). As a result, Orth simultaneously leaves vague the philosophical significance of Cassirer's reading of the cultural sciences and its relationship to his own philosophy; cf. Orth (2004, pp. 146f., footnote 17, and pp. 219f. and 355f.).

philosophy pursued the question of how Kant's critical philosophy led surprisingly to a renewed resurgence of metaphysics in German Idealism, he obtains from Kant's third *Critique* the arguments with which he formulates his answer to the post-Hegelian challenges of philosophy.<sup>230</sup> Cassirer deals with the failure of a deduction in Hegel's sense by reaching back to themes from Kant in order to clarify the relationship between the universal and particular and to inquire into the source of specification, themes which, in place of the logical, accentuate in advance the empirical and historical unfolding of the conditions of the symbolic. Cassirer thereby repeats the gesture of a return to Kant that had already been carried out in early Neo-Kantianism under the pressure of the failure of idealism.<sup>231</sup> That said, this does not lead him into a renewed epistemological connection with the natural sciences, but rather into an engagement with the empiricism of the cultural sciences as a philosopher of culture.

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**230** The chapter on Hegel in the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* thus begins in a way that is hardly accidental: "It was the historical fate of Kantian philosophy that, having the intention and view of limiting metaphysics in a critical fashion, it in truth gave to the last fundamental spiritual themes of metaphysics a new power and a new resonance" (*ECW* 4, p. 274).

**231** Thus, Cassirer himself, in his article "Neo-Kantianism" from the 1929 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which is contained in *ECW* 17, pp. 308–315, here p. 310, writes with respect to Eduard Zeller: "Hegel's 'Wissenschaft der Logik' and his 'Phänomenologie des Geistes' had been the last grandiose attempts to comprise the whole of knowledge in its content and to develop it constructively from one unifying idea. Zeller tries to show that the attempt did not reach its goal and could not reach it, 'because it overlooks the conditions of human knowledge, for it purports to grasp with one swoop from above the ideal of knowledge which, in reality, we can approach only gradually through complicated labour from below.'" The following chapter will demonstrate just how well this citation from a lecture by Zeller in 1862 fits in with Cassirer's re-reading of Kant's third *Critique*.

# The Empirical Transformation of the Transcendental

## Kant's Third Critique and Cassirer's Philosophy of Culture

Cassirer's *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 outlines a project that returns to the presuppositions of his philosophy in order to broaden it into a comprehensive philosophy of culture. In using the title of the symbolic, Cassirer is taking aim at the conditions of cultural meaning in general, and as such he inevitably begins with his studies in epistemology and the philosophy of science. Namely, he takes the conditions of knowledge, and thus the scientific concept that had always been a central point of interest for him, as a model for a conception of the symbolic that functions as a condition of cultural meaning as such, and which is therefore supposed to encompass language and myth alongside art and science. The scientific concept thus provides the archetype for a symbolics that results from its generalization, but it must now be possible to understand the concept as one of the realizations of the symbolic and to categorize it within a series of forms of the symbolic.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the symbolic itself is thus hardly an object of philosophical discussion in the *Disposition*, but rather serves Cassirer as a conceptual instrument for sketching out this initially still quite undetermined revision of the foundations of his philosophy.

The way in which the symbolic, as a universal condition of cultural meaning, relates to concrete fields of culture like science and aesthetics, however, raises fundamental questions. The symbolic must now be understood in so universal a manner as to facilitate the diverse phenomena of culture as a whole. At the same time, it is constantly realized in concrete fields of culture like the sciences or the arts, at which point it is not given in its universality, but rather in its empirical specifications. The symbolic is therefore characterized by a difference that arises between the most universal conditions of cultural meaning and its constant concrete realizations. From this starting position, Cassirer does not merely lay out a productive dynamic that will unfold following the *Disposition* in his studies on the philosophy of culture. At least in outline, he also raises here a question concerning the concept of the condition that is closely connected

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<sup>1</sup> For a supplementary perspective on the symbolic and its specifications beginning with Cassirer's reception of group theory in mathematics, cf. the enlightening study by Jean Lassègue (2020).

to Cassirer's Neo-Kantian heritage and his renewed engagement with Kant in the years prior to 1917.

In the context of his engagement with the aesthetics of the 18th century, Cassirer could thus find in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* a discussion of a systematic problem with the concept of the condition that exhibited fundamental similarities to the question of "the" symbolic as a condition of cultural meaning as such and its specification for various forms of symbolization. In the third *Critique*, alongside aesthetic experience, Kant also deals with biological knowledge, and in this context he discusses the question of how its conditions interact with the conditions of experience that he identifies at the most universal level in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but which had nevertheless simultaneously emulated the paradigm of knowledge in physics. As such, these conditions swiftly turn out to be unsuitable for understanding other forms of empirical knowledge that are unrelated to physics, such as biological knowledge and the principles, assumptions, and concepts that are peculiar to it. After Kant had initially simply excluded biology<sup>2</sup> in particular from the inner circle of the sciences, he was eventually compelled in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to realize that the most universal conditions of any knowledge whatsoever no longer represent a sufficient justification "where experience imposes on things a conformity to law that the understanding's general concept of the sensible is not sufficient to understand or explain" (*CPJ*, 5:169). His discussion of biological knowledge, but also of aesthetic experience, takes place in the context of this alarming discovery.

Kant thus makes an attempt at a nuanced solution by posing the question of how the universal conditions of experience as such, which he had formulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, are related to the concrete forms of experience and the specific orderings of their objects that he discusses in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. He thus leaves completely untouched the universal, transcendental, and *a priori* conditions of experience from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. At the same time, however, he now introduces conditions of empirical cognition, which must necessarily be assumed and are to that extent transcendental, but which are just as little *a priori* as they are purely empirical. The conditions of empirical cognition are thus of a twofold nature: they ultimately seek to ground themselves in the most universal *a priori* conditions, but are nevertheless constantly realized in their empirical specification in concrete forms of knowledge

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<sup>2</sup> Although the term "biology" admittedly only became established some years later, I will nevertheless speak of biology in connection with Kant, a choice which may be permissible since the following discussion does not have a primarily historical purpose.

and specific orderings of their objects. There thus opens up, for Kant, a gap between the universality of the transcendental and *a priori* conditions that encompass all possible experience as such and the necessary and specific conditions that characterize the concrete forms of empirical cognition and the orderings of their objects. This gap is the reason why Kant introduces the reflective judgment and investigates the principles peculiar to it, from aesthetics to teleology. At the same time, however, he thereby subjects his conception of transcendental reflection to a great deal of stress, to the point that the formal conditions of empirical experience can no longer be understood in a purely *a priori* and universal manner; rather, their empirical and specific realizations have to be included as well.

With this veritable transformation of transcendental reflection and its opening up towards specific, partially empirical conditions of experience, the possibility arises for Cassirer to occupy himself with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* specifically for his study in the history of ideas on the aesthetics of the 18th century and to pursue the possibility of incorporating aesthetic questions into his philosophy. Accordingly, this preoccupation leads him well beyond the expansion of his philosophy in terms of content, and thereby beyond the narrow limits of his epistemo-critical writings. No more are its systematic implications limited to the widespread and completely justified claim that Kant's third *Critique* had a significant influence on Cassirer's theory of the symbol.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the influence and significance of this renewed reading of Kant's third *Critique* only become apparent when, taking into account its background in epistemology and the history of science, we work through the shift in philosophical reflection that is carried out in that text and the simultaneous transformation of the concept of the condition. Just as, for Kant, the conditions of the concrete forms of empirical experience could neither be purely *a priori* nor merely empirical, and just as they had to be intertwined with the empirical characteristics and specific ordering of the objects of experience, Cassirer could not avoid simultaneously understanding "the" symbolic as the most universal transcendental condition of cultural meaning and at the same time relating it to the necessity of its specification into a variety of concrete, empirical, and historical forms of cultural symbolization. He thus takes up Kant's understanding of the way in which the universal, transcendental conditions refer to the specific con-

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<sup>3</sup> On that point, cf., e.g., the worthwhile work by Marion Lauschke (2007, in particular pp. 1–114). She quite plausibly reads the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as an aesthetics in the course of her investigation, although the real theoretical force of the third *Critique* and its systematic significance for the genesis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is certainly not exhausted by that reading. The task of the present chapter will be to focus on this aspect.

ditions of empirical experience, to their respective concepts and objects, and in accordance with this model he interweaves the transcendental ordering of the symbolic in general with the empirical ordering of the diverse forms of cultural symbolization.<sup>4</sup> Kant's broadening of the conditions involved in philosophical reflection and his discussion of their relation to reality, for which they can serve as conditions only in their concrete specification, thus opens up to Cassirer a possibility for an expansion, but also an altered self-understanding, of his own philosophy. In particular, his rereading of Kant refines the systematic outlines of Cassirer's empiricism in the philosophy of culture, which he will pursue in his extensive and intensive engagement with the cultural sciences of his day.

The fact that Cassirer was familiar with the intricate conceptual developments and philosophical potential of the third *Critique* is first suggested by his intimate knowledge of Kant's philosophy. It can, however, be given a more concrete and precise justification by the fact that Cassirer was undoubtedly engaged in a more exact reading of Kant's key texts in the years prior to 1917. Evidently, he was intensely preoccupied with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as proved by an extensive chapter in his general sketch of *Kant's Life and Thought*, to which he merely refers once again in *Freedom and Form*.<sup>5</sup> It does not escape Cassirer's informed gaze that Kant puts essential assumptions and problems of his critical philosophy to the test once again in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, nor that he has several innovative and alternative solutions in view. In addition, however, Cassirer's engagement with his own Kantian heritage also profited from one of Kant's lesser texts, in which the epistemological background and the philosophical virulence of the third *Critique* can be seen particularly clearly. The so-called "First Introduction" to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* certainly came across Cassirer's writing desk repeatedly, because the history of its publication is closely bound up with his editorial work.

That is to say, Cassirer was not occupied with Kant's third *Critique* during these years solely because of his investigation into the history of ideas in *Freedom and Form*; rather, he was also simultaneously editing Kant's *Werke*, where

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4 An essay by Ernst Wolfgang Orth gestures beyond the aesthetic horizon, although he only works through the problematic peculiar to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which found enormously fruitful soil in Cassirer, to a slight degree in this context; cf. Orth (2004, pp. 176–189, here pp. 183–186). Orth also frequently emphasized the significance of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in his earlier work; cf., e.g., Orth (1985, pp. 177–179 – this text was also included in Orth 2004, pp. 68–99, here pp. 79f.).

5 Cf. the reference in *ECW* 7, p. 179, and the corresponding chapter in Cassirer (1981, pp. 271–360).

the “First Introduction” first appeared in complete form and by that title.<sup>6</sup> The text had already had an eventful history by that time. Unlike the published introduction, it came about in the midst of Kant’s work on the main text of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, but was nevertheless rejected by Kant for the publication of the text.<sup>7</sup> Instead, he made a transcription of his manuscript available to his student Johann Sigismund Beck, who was at the time working on a general sketch of Kant’s thought, as part of which an abbreviated version of the introduction was printed.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the whole 19th century, the text was known only in this form and, due to later editions, by the bizarre title “Concerning Philosophy as Such” [“Über Philosophie überhaupt”], until no less a figure than Wilhelm Dilthey rediscovered the transcription and drew attention to it in two texts from 1889.<sup>9</sup> Finally, on that basis, the text was edited anew by Otto Buek and appeared in 1914 in the fifth volume of the so-called Cassirer edition of Kant’s *Werke*.<sup>10</sup> This edition was ultimately supplemented in 1918 by Cassirer’s general sketch of *Kant’s Life and Thought*.

The “First Introduction” to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* thus crossed Cassirer’s path at the time when he was beginning to leave the limits of his epistemo-critical writings behind him and outlining his new project of a “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” In this situation of transition, he encountered a text that aims at and documents a transition of its own. Accordingly, the following section will, with the help of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and particularly on the basis of its “First Introduction,” pursue this transition by Kant, which resulted

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**6** Cf. Kant (1914a). A translation of this text is included in the English translation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and referenced here as *FI*. -Trans.

**7** On the history of the text, cf. the editor’s interpretation in Kant (1914a, pp. 581–591), as well as Gerhard Lehmann’s introduction to Kant (1927, pp. III–VIII); this text by Lehmann is also included in the second and third edition of the Hamburg volume from 1970 and 1977. Cf. also Norbert Hinske’s discussion of the history of the text in Kant (1965, pp. III–XII). On the philological problems and questions of dating, cf. Helga Mertens (1975, in particular pp. 235–252).

**8** Cf. Beck (1794, pp. 541–590). I am taking this information from Hinske’s discussion.

**9** Cf. Dilthey (1889a, pp. 358f., and 1889b, pp. 593f.). The texts are included in Dilthey (1959, pp. 555–575, here pp. 567f. and 310–353), where the second text was given the new title “Kant’s Letters to Beck” [“Briefe Kants an Beck”] and the introductory passage reduced to the reference to the manuscript of the “First Introduction.” Dilthey also documents in this text the correspondence between Beck and Kant pertaining to the transmission of the manuscript; cf. Dilthey (1989b, pp. 632–637, or 1959, pp. 339–343). The question of to what extent the “Introduction” to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* had an influence on Dilthey himself can remain open here. Makkreel (1969, pp. 429–431) asserts such an influence, although both his argumentation and his references seem quite nonspecific.

**10** This was followed by further editions, among others by Gerhard Lehmann, who also provided the version that is part of the Academy edition of Kant’s work; cf. *Ak.* 20:193–251.



from the insight into the limits of the determinations of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This insight entailed a transformation of the transcendental, a transformation of which Cassirer knew how to take advantage, since he, with a view to aesthetics, felt himself obligated to broaden his own philosophy and rework its foundations.<sup>11</sup>

## The Background of Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment in Philosophy of Science

The point of departure for Kant's philosophy is characterized by his understanding of the sciences of his day. Already in the introduction to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant outlines the famous "revolution in the way of thinking" that must also serve as the standard for philosophy: instead of conforming to the given objects, the scientific method prescribes conditions to them in order to pose very specific questions to nature and to wrest from it unambiguous answers.<sup>12</sup> The central question of the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori* turns out to be related just as closely to scientific knowledge: namely, according to Kant, this question is only meaningful at all because synthetic judgments *a priori* exist in mathematical knowledge and because such judgments are also contained in the natural sciences "as principles" (*CPR*, B 17).<sup>13</sup> The possible appearance of metaphysics, which on Kant's model is supposed to follow the path of a science, will thus have to conform with the genesis and structure of the cognitions of the sciences that are to be described.

This is only an indication of the point of departure of the full extent of Kant's argumentation, which, on the basis of the *a priori* forms of intuition and understanding, develops the articulated structure of a cognition from that which is given empirically, and thus passes from the transcendental aesthetic and its discussion of space and time, through the deduction of the concepts of the understanding, and up to the schematism and the system of fundamental principles in the transcendental logic. The point of departure, however, already establishes a fusion of this argumentation with the paradigm of scientific knowledge that will

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted in passing that, with this language of transformation, I am *not* relying on Karl-Otto Apel's once-common program of the semiotic transformation of philosophy. Apel referred to Cassirer only rarely, and with just as much criticism as imprecision; cf. Apel (1998, pp. 101f.). In contrast, Heinz Paetzold sees a connection between Apel's and Cassirer's continuation of Kantian philosophy; cf. Paetzold (1982, in particular pp. 124–147).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *CPR*, B XII–XIV.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the whole passage, *CPR*, B 12–21.

extend far into Kant's philosophical concept-formation. This holds true, not only for the assumption of actually existing scientific cognitions as such, but also for their concrete forms and specific disciplines, which provide the key examples for the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thus, it is not only universally logical concepts, but rather also specific concepts, largely from Euclidean geometry and from mathematical physics (e.g., space and causality), that enter into Kant's philosophical definitions of the *a priori* conditions of cognition.<sup>14</sup> By tracing his concepts back from the exact sciences to the conditions of experience as such, Kant believes, on the one hand, that he has taken a decisive step towards the justification of scientific cognition. On the other hand, however, his argumentation simultaneously depends on individual exact natural sciences and their state of knowledge at the time, which turns Kant into an extremely fascinating object of study in the history of science and philosophy and which can also be an occasion for historicizing and putting into question his claim to a transcendental justification of scientific knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

In what follows, in contrast, I will pursue the close connection between Kant's philosophy and the sciences of his day in terms of its inner, philosophical dynamic, and discuss it in light of the question of the specific conditions of empirical knowledge. The reason is that the picture that has been sketched out is too simplified to be able to depict Kant's ongoing struggle towards the justification of scientific knowledge, and especially his increasingly sophisticated argumentation. In spite of all his points of overlap with mathematics and physics, it is not at all proven that the *Critique of Pure Reason* can already be counted as a justification of these disciplines; rather, this text works through the conditions of possible experience and its objectivity in general, without taking into account

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<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the basic idea of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is essentially the result of Kant's engagement with the conceptions of space by Newton and Leibniz; on the broad outlines, cf. a writer as early as Erich Adickes (1924, here particularly volume 1, pp. 233–240); for more nuance and further detail, cf. Karen Gloy (1984, pp. 7–9) and, although his interpretation is occasionally a bit idiosyncratic, Kaulbach (1960, in particular pp. 24–33 and 90–98).

<sup>15</sup> Numerous works have documented this “dependence” of Kant on the sciences of his day and explained quite correctly how in most cases, both initially and throughout, the exact sciences, and chiefly mathematical physics, stood in the foreground; cf. the exemplary and authoritative studies by Peter Plaass (1994) and Michael Friedman (1992b). Historically speaking, though, we must take into account the fact that the physics of the 18th century should not be equated with the present-day discipline, which emerged definitively via the differentiation of the sciences in the 19th century and which attained its disciplinary stature primarily through the development of an independent mathematics and chemistry; on that subject, cf. Rudolf Stichweh (1984, pp. 94–251).

the different methods and characteristic objects of individual disciplines. Ultimately, we must ask the question of how Kant's reflection is related to the individual disciplines: is it so closely bound up with physics and mathematics that their insights are justified immediately by the *a priori* conditions that it eventually works out, while the insights of other disciplines are not? Or are these conditions so universal that they justify scientific knowledge completely in general, while still simultaneously having to be specified for the concrete forms of empirical knowledge, which would in consequence, however, probably also have to hold true for physics in particular?<sup>16</sup>

In the texts following the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it becomes apparent just how strongly Kant's argumentation is characterized by his engagement with the sciences of his day and how deeply permeated it is by a tense relationship between its promised universality and its paradigmatic examples. Namely, it is not just that Kant engages with physics in a more detailed way in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Beyond that, in later works, he incorporates into epistemological reflection disciplines to which he had just a few years previously denied any scientificity as a result of his orientation on physics. His attempts to justify biology or chemistry as well, however, do not merely lead Kant to engage with their conceptual idiosyncrasies, but also to take into consideration other forms of cognition and their justification. From the beginning, Kant's philosophical terminology and the form taken by his reflections are not left untouched by the specific differences among the individual disciplines, and they are developed further and, where necessary, modified throughout his ongoing intensive engagement with the sciences. Accordingly, what follows will focus on the models of justification, explanation, and description in scientific cognition and the question of its relation to the specific conditions of the methods and objects of the individual concrete sciences.

The *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* from 1786 gives the initial evidence for a close connection to the mathematical physics of Kant's day. It is not merely that Kant postulates in the preface that the scientificity of knowledge should be measured solely by the extent to which its laws are *a priori*: "A rational doctrine of nature thus deserves the name of a natural science, only in case the fundamental natural laws therein are cognized *a priori*, and are not mere

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**16** This question has been answered, for example, by Gerd Buchdahl with respect to Newtonian physics with a definitive "yes"; cf. Buchdahl (1981, pp. 90–93). His discussion of the "necessity of a special foundation" for "natural science" – notably in the singular – remains, however, imprecise, since it is based on passages that were arbitrarily collected from the entirety of Kant's work (Buchdahl 1981, p. 97). In so doing, however, Buchdahl also largely avoids the development of Kant's thought that is discussed in what follows.

laws of experience" (*MF*, 4:468).<sup>17</sup> He simultaneously suggests the convergence of these *a priori* laws with the application of mathematical methods when he delivers his famous formulation that "in any special doctrine of nature there can be only as much *proper* science as there is *mathematics* therein" (*MF*, 4:470).<sup>18</sup> Knowledge in natural science is held to the standard of mathematics, and physics seems to be limited to its application in the field of exact empirical knowledge.

Admittedly, the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* does not merely give evidence of the influence of mathematics and physics on Kant's philosophy; it also represents an attempt, going beyond the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to draw nearer to the concrete form of knowledge in physics and the specific characteristics of its objects. The *a priori* laws that a natural science has at its disposal must therefore be based on the transcendental conditions of experience in order to constitute the "pure part" of a "*proper* natural science ... on which the apodictic certainty that reason seeks therein can be based" (*MF*, 4:470). They are, however, just as little reducible to these most universal *a priori* conditions as to the application of mathematical methods that are *a priori* per se, since the specific manner of relation to the objects of knowledge in the natural sciences goes beyond mathematics. Namely, as Kant had already emphasized in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, mathematics – particularly as compared to philosophy – is characterized by the fact that it constructs its objects in intuition *a priori*.<sup>19</sup> It thus, on the one hand, enjoys the privilege of being completely *a priori*, unlike any natural science. On the other hand, however, it pays the price of that privilege by having no objects of objective reality at all, in the strict sense, because according to Kant the latter are by definition empirical.<sup>20</sup> The natural sciences, in contrast, do refer to such objects, which have to be given in outer experience and are thus subject to time and space.<sup>21</sup>

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17 On the argumentative context of this and the following citation, cf. the more detailed reconstruction by Plaass (1994, pp. 229–277). It should also be noted here that the appeal to mathematics in Kant should by no means be misunderstood in terms of a purely axiomatic-deductive justification of cognition; cf. Plaass (1994, pp. 232f.) and especially Friedman (1992b, pp. 55–95). The axiomatization of mathematics only arises towards the end of the 19th century.

18 On the historical context of this thesis, cf. Stichweh (1984, pp. 180–188).

19 Cf. *CPR*, A 713f./B 741f.

20 Cf. *CPR*, B146f., and for more detail *CPR*, A 155–158/B 194–197; for clarification, cf. also Plaass (1994, pp. 257f.) and Friedman (1992b, pp. 94 and 98–102).

21 The complementary inner objects are also mentioned here alongside the outer objects – the question of the possibility of a "*doctrine of the soul*" (*MF*, 4:467), however, is of no larger significance for the line of thought that is being pursued here, especially since Kant ultimately does not believe it to be capable of scientificity; cf. *MF*, 4:471f.

The decisive argument of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* can now be seen in the claim that knowledge of these outer objects can by no means be reduced to the application of mathematical resources to empirical intuition. Rather, that knowledge involves *specific a priori conditions* to the extent that the particular characteristics of these empirical objects in time and space contain within themselves specific *a priori* conditions from the outset.<sup>22</sup> As Peter Plaass has already shown, Kant is therefore, under the presupposition of the empirical concept of matter, working out the *a priori* determinations that are simultaneously co-determined in this concept by the pure concepts of the understanding.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Kant is not, as he does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, inquiring solely into the most universal “*transcendental* part of the metaphysics of nature” in a manner that is “undetermined with respect to the nature of this or that thing in the sensible world”; rather, he takes as his basis “the empirical concept of matter” and seeks to reproduce “that sphere of cognition of which reason is capable *a priori* concerning these objects” (*MF*, 4:469f.).

Kant thus ventures beyond the question in the *Critique of Pure Reason* concerning the conditions of the possibility of experience as such methodologically<sup>24</sup> by specifying them under the presupposition of the empirical concept of matter and thereby undertaking a “*special metaphysical natural science*”<sup>25</sup> that is supposed to encompass the “determinations of the general concept of a matter in general” as well as “all that may be ... thought *a priori*”<sup>26</sup> thereby. Instead of

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *MF*, 4:470 and 4:472f.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. in particular Plaass (1994, pp. 282ff.), as well as, with important supplements and corrections, Friedman (2001b and 1992c, here pp. 80–83). Adickes (1924, Vol. 1, pp. 247–271) summarizes the argumentation of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* without bringing into view the innovative questions that it poses. He thus criticizes Kant’s claim to an *a priori* knowledge of matter by an appeal to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and in so doing reduces all formal conditions to the *a priori* categories that are established there, as well as understanding all of the problems dealt with in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* as “material conditions” in order to pass them off to empiricism: “There are no *particular formal* presuppositions for individual objects of experience; thus, they too cannot be detected by the transcendental method” (Adickes 1924, Vol. 1, p. 280). Cf. also Adickes (1924, Vol. 1, pp. 263f.), and the same argument put forth yet again in further detail in Adickes (1924, Vol. 1, pp. 367–371). As a result, Adickes avoids Kant’s question concerning the particular laws of nature and their conditions, both formal and specific, transcendental and empirical.

<sup>24</sup> Kant himself reflects on this step when he explains in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* that its central and postulated empirical concept of motion could not at all have appeared among the categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, because the latter had to keep to what is purely *a priori*; cf. *MF*, 4:482.

<sup>25</sup> *MF*, 4:470.

<sup>26</sup> *MF*, 4:475f.

allowing transcendental reflection to come across *a priori* conditions of experience at the clear border of something empirical that cannot be derived and so has to be added, Kant thus extends this boundary even further in order to “expound this [pure] part as far as possible in its entirety, separated and wholly unmixed with the other [empirical, A.S.] part ... This is necessary in order that one may precisely determine what reason can accomplish for itself, and where its power begins to require the assistance of principles of experience” (*MF*, 4:469f.).<sup>27</sup> This “separation”<sup>28</sup> of the *a priori* principles of knowledge in the natural sciences, however, is based on their specification with respect to the particular and empirical characteristics of the material objects of outer experience.

It is physics that plays the decisive role in this specification of the objects of natural science and the form of their representation. The reason is that Kant, in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, defines matter as “the *movable* in space” and specifies its *a priori* determinations in terms of the concept of motion in physics as it had developed from Galileo’s law of falling bodies, through Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, and up to Newton’s laws of motion (*MF*, 4:480).<sup>29</sup> More precisely, he is attempting to prove central parts of these laws *a priori* and to establish them as an essential component of the “pure part” of the natural sciences. This part is thus based on mathematical conditions, but it goes decisively beyond mathematics and beyond any simple application of the pure concepts of the understanding to what is given in intuition, because it essentially contains the laws of motion in physics and is grounded significantly in that discipline’s theory of the reference frame of motion.<sup>30</sup>

Looking back to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, thus, we can state with justification that “Kant pushes his theory of natural science a step further into the concrete” (Plaass 1994, p. 331). It is worth emphasizing, however, that this concreteness is grasped by beginning with one single natural science, physics, since the *a priori* laws of motion are supposed to be valid for all material objects of cognition as such. In contrast, all other disciplines, and in particular the inexact

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<sup>27</sup> On *MF*, 4:534, he writes: “And so metaphysical investigation behind that which lies at the basis of the empirical concept of matter is useful only for the purpose of guiding natural philosophy, so far as this is ever possible, to explore dynamical grounds of explanation. For these alone permit the hope of determinate laws, and thus a true rational coherence of explanations.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *MF*, 4:472f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also *MF*, 4:478f., as well as, for a helpful overview with a great deal of supporting evidence, Heinz Heimsoeth (1970, pp. 1–85, here pp. 10–35).

<sup>30</sup> On the step beyond mathematics, cf. the concise explanation in *MF*, 4:534f. Friedman (1992b, pp. 136–164) shows just how much, for example, Kant’s discourse is permeated by the discussion in physics concerning the reference frame of motion.

natural sciences, are mired in the need for justification. The reason is that the specific conditions that are peculiar to them can be classified as merely empirical in cases where they do not, unlike those of mathematical physics and its purely *a priori* part, correspond to principles. In the case of chemistry, therefore, even the connections and laws that have to be assumed as conditions in order to understand the characteristic object of chemical knowledge per se as what it is seem to Kant to be merely empirical. He understands them as “mere laws of experience” and knowledge of them as being of merely “empirical certainty,” ultimately drawing the conclusion that chemistry cannot be valid as science (*MF*, 4:468).<sup>31</sup> What is decisive here is not solely the fact that chemistry, at least at the time of Kant, could hardly be mathematized; it is also by no means evident how the processes analyzed in chemistry should be reduced, in analogy to physics, to the movement of material objects and to the effects of physical forces.<sup>32</sup> “[*N*]atural description” or “natural history,” which were to be attributed to biology, do not fare any better on Kant’s assessment (*MF*, 4:468). In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, he opens up the possibility of justifying these forms of knowledge too only to the extent that they are capable of approximating the pure part of the natural sciences, and thus the *a priori* laws borrowed from physics.<sup>33</sup>

Kant’s attempt at a more precise justification of physics thus reveals the particular problem area of his philosophy of science. It orients itself on one individual discipline and bases itself on the laws of motion in physics in order to derive the definitive, transcendental, and *a priori* framework for the representation of all empirical objects by way of the empirical concept of matter.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, all other disciplines have to fall behind in terms of their epistemological value

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**31** The reason is not merely that this general claim holds true for chemistry: “cognition that can contain mere empirical certainty is only *knowledge* improperly so-called” (*MF*, 4:468). Kant also explicitly sets chemistry apart from the sciences: “If, however, the grounds or principles themselves are still in the end merely empirical, as in chemistry, for example, and the laws from which the given facts are explained through reason are mere laws of experience, then they carry with them no consciousness of their necessity (they are not apodictically certain), and thus the whole of cognition does not deserve the name of a science in the strict sense; chemistry should therefore be called a systematic art rather than a science” (*MF*, 4:468). Cf. also *MF*, 4:470 f.

**32** Cf. this reductionistic claim in *MF*, 4:523 ff., and with reference to chemistry in *MF*, 4:470 f.

**33** Thus, according to Kant, “every doctrine of nature must finally lead to natural science and conclude there, because this necessity of laws is inseparably attached to the concept of nature, and therefore makes claim to be thoroughly comprehended” (*MF*, 4:469).

**34** Thus, Plaass (1994, p. 258) is completely justified in speaking of the “fundamental position of physics among the natural sciences” with respect to Kant, but he underestimates the problematic that is given by that position and the dynamic that unfolds from it in Kant’s later writings.

to the extent that they are unable to engage in this determination of their object in the manner of physics. This problem essentially arises as a result of the specification of the *a priori* conditions of cognition as such in light of physics, but as such it also raises the question of the relationship of this specification to the most universal conditions of experience. The reason is that these conditions are apparently too general and too specific at the same time: on the one hand, they were formulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with an orientation on physics in order to be able to justify at least their purely *a priori* part, such that from the outset they hardly seem suitable for doing justice to other disciplines and their representation of objects as well; on the other hand, they are nevertheless also too general to be able to justify even physics itself immediately, which is why Kant, in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, has to rely on the empirical specification of its objects by way of the concept of matter. Philosophical reflection on the *a priori* conditions of empirical knowledge does not immediately entail their justification, but rather introduces a difference between the universal conditions and empirical specification of the sciences, which remains a concern for Kant's philosophy of science even beyond the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.

Admittedly, Kant will by no means put his orientation on the example of physics into question in any explicit form. Advances in biology and chemistry, which Kant followed closely, soon caused this mere discrediting of these disciplines as “unscientific” to appear unsatisfactory. According to Michael Friedman, they instilled in Kant a new optimism for including these sciences too in his reflections and for getting to work on their justification.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant, with a view to biological knowledge and its objects, seems to be concerned, as Peter McLaughlin puts it, with determining “the boundaries of mechanistic explanation from the inside,” as it were, “at the special request of a particular phenomenon” (1990, p. 40). The most prominent phenomenon, and the one that is most central for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is thus the organism, because its inner, purposive organization and its independent movement can hardly be explained on a foundation rooted in phys-

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Friedman (1992b, pp. 264–290), who, however, discusses chemistry with a view to the later emergence of the so-called *Opus postumum*; cf. also Friedman (1992b, pp. 213–220 and 237–242). On what Kant borrowed conceptually and methodologically from the chemistry of his day, cf. also Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Mai Lequan (2010, pp. 410–412). I will make reference to the secondary literature on the role of biology throughout the course of this discussion.



ics.<sup>36</sup> Kantian natural science was already unable to deal with organisms because it had defined matter as “lifeless,” in the sense that the latter is not itself supposed to be able to “determine itself” to “motion or rest, as change of its state” in conformity with the principle of inertia (*MF*, 4:544). Problems no less fundamental were raised by the taxonomic order of living nature as it had developed over the centuries, having seen substantial progress beginning with the work of Linnaeus in the 1730s, though it had also simultaneously been subjected to a fundamental critique chiefly by Buffon.<sup>37</sup> Kant had continued to regard this “*natural description*” and “its system of classification ... in accordance with ... similarities” with skepticism in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and he ultimately did not consider it to be a science in any genuine sense (*MF*, 4:468).<sup>38</sup> A few years later, however, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he delves into these problems once again and takes up the philosophical challenge of a possible justification of biological knowledge.

As such, Kant now concedes to biology its own form of knowledge that is irreducible to physics and understands it as an independent philosophical problem. Thereby, he takes sides in the contemporary conflict between mechanistic-reductionist and teleological-vitalist views of life, albeit with reservations, and he inquires into the specific presuppositions of biological objects by reference to the order of the living and the organization of the organism. In so doing, he encounters a new type of condition, since biological knowledge must, on Kant’s analysis, make assumptions concerning its objects that – even under the presupposition of an empirical concept – cannot be justified *a priori*. The expansion of philosophical reflection to biological knowledge and the conditions that are peculiar to it is, for this reason, by no means limited to determining “the boundaries of mechanistic explanation from the inside” (McLaughlin

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**36** On Kant’s relation to the biology of his day, and in particular to the question of the organism, cf. Reinhard Löw (1980, in particular pp. 138–191), Peter McLaughlin (1990, pp. 7–52), and James Larson (1994, in particular pp. 170–182). Even Max Horkheimer, in his dissertation *On the Antinomy of the Teleological Judgment* [*Zur Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilskraft*] from 1922, sketches out this problem area in a few significant passages, although he measures the question of biological knowledge by the standard of objectivity from the *Critique of Pure Reason* and therefore mistakenly reduces the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to a mechanistic position; cf. Horkheimer (1987, pp. 13–72, in particular pp. 24–47).

**37** On the historical development of the problem of classification in Linnaeus, but also on its historical background, cf. Larson (1971, pp. 6–121), as well as, on Buffon’s critique, Philipp Sloan (1976).

**38** Plaass (1994, pp. 235f.) interprets this reference in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in the sense of a demand for the teleological alignment of all disciplines according to the measure of physics, following *MF*, 4:468.

1990, p. 40). It puts into question the previous framework for transcendental reflection on the conditions of cognition to the extent that it introduces necessary and specific assumptions that are nevertheless unable to be deduced, and thus novel conditions of empirical knowledge. In what follows, I will understand these novel, specific conditions, on the one hand, as *transcendental conditions* on the basis of their necessity (even if this attribute, in the strict Kantian sense, designates the form of reflection itself, which will hardly be left untouched by the shifts in question).<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, however, I will distinguish these necessary, transcendental conditions from *a priori conditions* in the strict sense, which according to Kant can be deduced *a priori* and which are as such universal.

Consequently, it is worth discussing more precisely the way in which the conditions of cognition can be conceived of in full, both in their universality and in their specifications, as well as in their *a priori* and empirical aspects. For this purpose, I will focus on the dynamic of this question that is rooted in the philosophy of science and not unfold the historical context of Kant's philosophy *en detail*. In that task, I will orient myself on the illustrative question of the order of life, since this example, on the one hand, highlights an aspect of Kant's inquiry that has hitherto been little discussed outside the specialized secondary literature and, on the other hand, since the problem of the organism has already been dealt with in detail in the secondary literature on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and chiefly on its second part, the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment."

## The Reflective Judgment and the Two Natures of Things

The new approach of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* can be developed with the help of a form of activity carried out by the faculty of cognition referred to in the title, which Kant introduces anew in this piece. The power of judgment is initially defined in general, as in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as the "faculty of *subsuming* under rules"<sup>40</sup> or the "faculty for the *subsumption of the particular* under the general."<sup>41</sup> While in the *Critique of Pure Reason* this consists by definition in "determining whether something stands under a given rule (*casus datae*

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<sup>39</sup> On Kant's understanding of "transcendental reflection," cf. *CPR*, A 260/B 316-A 263/B 319. Also pointing in the suggested direction towards an alteration of the form of this reflection is the interpretation by Löw (1980, pp. 191f.).

<sup>40</sup> *CPR*, A 132/B 171.

<sup>41</sup> *FI*, 20:201.

legis) or not,” the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* does not begin with the assumption that the universal under which the particular is to be apprehended is in principle given by the understanding (*CPR*, A 132/B 171). Instead, it distinguishes the activity of the “determining judgment,” for which this is the case, from the “reflective judgment” precisely by the fact that the latter has to seek out the universal for the particular itself.<sup>42</sup> It thus assists the understanding in its “necessary business of finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception” (*CPJ*, 5:186). This reflection on the universal with the help of the particular and the principles that are peculiar to it is the focus of the new, third *Critique*.

Consequently, the reflective judgment has a particular task in its own right, insofar as many aspects still have to be determined by the “particular beings in nature”<sup>43</sup> and the “different natural forms,”<sup>44</sup> whereas the determining judgment determined these objects by means of the *a priori* categories, though merely on the most general level. That is, the categories only establish what defines the objects of experience as such, while they remain “undetermined” to the extent that the specific laws or concepts that distinguish them, for example, as concrete objects of biology do not have an *a priori* status in the sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPJ*, 5:179).<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, this “indeterminacy” highlights a “suspension” of the determining judgment to the extent that it has inherent limitations within its own domain, the field of appearances, since not every determination of appearances relies on the categories that are given to it by the understanding and which schematize it for all possible objects of experience. Thus, “indeterminacy” does not signify any complete indeterminacy, because appearances are quite definitely subordinated to the categories and determined by them. Rather, it indicates a determinacy of “natural forms” that is not a result of the understanding and its *a priori* categories and which can be characterized as “indeterminate” only in this respect.

Kant’s privative characterization thus makes it clear, on the one hand, that he is beginning, as he does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with the schematization of concepts of the understanding by means of the determining judgment and attempting to justify the determinacy of objects on that basis. On the other hand,

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<sup>42</sup> On what follows, cf. also *FI*, 20:211–216.

<sup>43</sup> *CPJ*, 5:183.

<sup>44</sup> *FI*, 20:213.

<sup>45</sup> On the determinacy and indeterminacy of empirical objects and laws of experience, see a writer as early as Konrad Marc-Wogau (1938, in particular pp. 4–14). Admittedly, his anticipation of the dialectical relations of concepts occasionally causes Marc-Wogau to accept simplifications of the Kantian text.

however, it also demonstrates that Kant is taking into consideration the limits of the determination of objects by means of the *a priori* categories of the understanding, which ultimately also turn out to be the limits of his own justification of knowledge on the basis of *a priori* concepts of the understanding. This “failure” of a simple apriorism, however, simultaneously allows for the empirical aspects of cognition to be taken into account. It is not merely that this *a priori* “indeterminate determinacy” refers to genuinely empirical sources of knowledge and its objects. It also offers a space for specific forms of knowledge like biology, whose peculiar terminology and particular method can no more be reduced to the most universal conditions of all objects of experience as such than can the characteristic specificity of its objects, even if those conditions were not marked by their paradigmatic relation to Newtonian physics. The reflective judgment thus finds its field of activity between the *a priori* and empirical sources of the objective determination of knowledge and in the interaction between the most universal conditions and their concrete specifications.

This field was still relatively uncharted in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, even if perhaps not completely unfamiliar in that text.<sup>46</sup> Its characterization, therefore, results in several striking conceptual shifts, a point which becomes particularly clear by way of the concept of nature.<sup>47</sup> In the first *Critique*, nature was defined as the “sum total of appearances insofar as these are in thoroughgoing connection through an inner principle of causality,” and it thereby identified a “subsisting whole” in which all individual objects of experience are determined by causal laws (*CPR*, A 419/B 446, n.).<sup>48</sup> Kant justifies this claim by the fact that these objects, and thus nature, stand under the conditions of intuition and the understanding, which is why, in particular, they are subject to causality and are determined by their place in the causal nexus. Even in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* from 1786, Kant continues to define nature, in strict conformity with the paradigm of the mathematical knowledge of physics, as the “sum total of all things, insofar as they can be *objects of our senses*, and thus also of experience” and claims that it “is therefore understood as the whole of all appearances” (*MF*, 4:467). As he suggests with the italicized words, however, he is simultaneously beginning in this context with the empirical concept of matter in order

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<sup>46</sup> I am not using the term “field” [*Feld*] here in the sense of Kant’s definition in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:174. There, he speaks instead of the “residence (*domicilium*)” in contrast to the “domain (*ditio*),” since the reflective judgment does not give laws *a priori*, but rather has to generate laws empirically and organize them into a system as far as possible, as will be discussed below.

<sup>47</sup> On what follows, cf. also Löw (1980, pp. 129–137).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. also *CPR*, A 216/B 263.

to specify the most universal *a priori* laws of the understanding for the objects of outer experience, to bring out the *a priori* content of this empirical specification under the auspices of those laws, and thereby to justify an *a priori* knowledge in the empirical concept of motion. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, such an attempt at justifying the “*a priori* in the empirical” is no longer the focus.<sup>49</sup> The reason is that Kant is now also engaging with characteristics of knowledge and its objects that cannot themselves be derived under the presupposition of an empirical concept as its co-positing *a priori* content. They no longer determine the objects of knowledge constitutively and do not imply any *a priori* knowing, even if they represent assumptions that cognition must necessarily presuppose in its operation.

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* thus extends the concept of nature beyond the pure part of natural science by comprehending the *a priori* laws as foundations for their concrete specification into empirical laws, which is initially reflected in a subdivision of nature with respect to its transcendental universality and empirical specificity: “But there is such a manifold of forms in nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature that are left undetermined by those laws that the pure understanding gives *a priori*, since these pertain only to the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses) in general, that there must nevertheless also be laws for it which, as empirical, may seem to be contingent in accordance with the insight of our understanding, but which, if they are to be called laws (as is also required by the concept of a nature), must be regarded as necessary on a principle of the unity of the manifold, even if that principle is unknown to us” (*CPJ*, 5:179 f.). Accordingly, the transcendental conditions of the “possibility of a nature” now no longer define the possible objects of knowledge without further efforts – not even if, as in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, they are specified as an *a priori* component of empirical objects, as Kant indicates by speaking of “nature (as object of the senses) in general.” Rather, the “universal transcendental concepts of nature” now represent merely the necessary and collective foundation for their necessary “modifications,” by means of which the “manifold of forms in nature” are first characterized as such.

This distinction corresponds to that between “particular” and “universal laws”: while universal laws are prescribed to appearances as such by the understanding or, more precisely, as *a priori* laws they determine the objects of expe-

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<sup>49</sup> This new approach in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which will be the focus of what follows, is usually underestimated in systematic terms when the *Critique of Pure Reason* or the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* is taken as the point of departure; by way of example, cf. Plaass (1994, pp. 324 f. and 332).

rience in general, particular laws specify the objects of experience within this framework, but in an irreducibly empirical and consequently underivable manner that goes beyond the universal laws.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the determining judgment operates by schematizing the pure concepts of the understanding that are given to it or by applying them to the given appearances, such that these concepts are valid *a priori* for any individual object: this *a priori* framework for knowledge is necessary and for that reason objective, because it establishes for the first time what can count as an object of knowledge.<sup>51</sup> The activity of the reflective judgment, in contrast, is characterized precisely by the fact that it aims beyond that, at laws that govern the concrete objects of experience without necessarily being prescribed to them by *a priori* conditions of cognition. In this sense, they cannot be derived and are thus described by Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as previously in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, as “accidental.”<sup>52</sup>

However, this characterization, which is once again purely privative, should not, any more than in the case of the aforementioned “indeterminacy,” belie the fact that it is matched by a positive characteristic of empirical knowledge. That is, the laws at which the activity of the reflective judgment aims have a necessity

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50 At least in one passage from the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant already speaks of “particular laws,” but he sets this point aside because it is not valid for “experience in general”: “The pure faculty of understanding does not suffice, however, to prescribe to the appearances through mere categories *a priori* laws beyond those on which rests a *nature in general*, as lawfulness of appearances in space and time. Particular laws, because they concern empirically determined appearances, *cannot be completely derived* from the categories, although they all stand under them. Experience must be added in order to come to know particular laws *at all*; but about experience in general, and about what can be cognized as an object of experience, only those *a priori* laws offer instruction” (CPR, B 165). It can remain a matter of fierce debate whether Kant is here playing on the mode of proof used in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, which did indeed appear before the second edition, or whether we see here the emergence of the conceptual innovations that will be elaborated in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that appears three years later. A parallel passage in the first edition, in any case, is a great deal less discriminating in stating without further elaboration: “But all empirical laws are only particular determinations of the pure laws of the understanding, under which and in accordance with whose norm they are first possible” (CPR, A 128f.). The problem of the “particular laws” apparently attains its systematic shape only gradually.

51 On the justification of objectivity in the necessity of cognition, cf. CPR, A 106 and A 191/B 236.

52 On this term in comparison with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cf. the concise remarks by Ingrid Bauer-Drevermann (1966, in particular p. 501): “The accidental is not that for which there is no law, but rather that which is not sufficiently determined by the familiar law of the understanding.”

of their own – but this necessity is that of being what first allows appearances to be comprehended as concrete and specific objects of empirical knowledge. It is one of the primary objectives of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to characterize this idiosyncratic necessity of the particular laws and, as far as possible, also to justify it. With these laws, however, Kant is now, with a view to biology, assuming conditions that can neither be accounted for by a transcendental reflection in the sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason* nor justified by fixed *a priori* conditions, even if they are specified for determinate objects under the presupposition of an empirical concept following the pattern of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. These novel conditions, which cognition assumes in order to presuppose something specific concerning the objects, although the latter by no means has to comply with it constitutively, more closely approximate the empirical aspect of experience. If he is to take these conditions into consideration, Kant cannot avoid modifying the form of his own reflection, even if the privative characterizations of “undetermined” and “accidental” laws reveal his efforts to adhere to familiar methods. This underlying problem of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* becomes particularly clear in the “First Introduction,” for which reason the following discussion will be based mainly on this text.

## The Reflective Judgment and its Assumptions according to the “First Introduction”

The principle of the reflective judgment, which can only adhere to a principle of its own at all because it, unlike the determining judgment, is not bound up with the stipulations of the understanding, is the focus of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its “First Introduction.”<sup>53</sup> Generally speaking, this principle consists in the fact that the reflective judgment has to assume particular, underivable, and thus “accidental” laws for the objects of empirical knowledge in order to subsume those objects to said laws and to be able to cognize them as such. Kant initially understands this principle as “subjective” insofar as the existence of these laws cannot be justified *a priori*, but we are nevertheless dealing with the sort of laws that have to be assumed beyond the *a priori* categories of the understanding in order to do justice to the particularity of the objects of our knowledge. Nevertheless, according to the “First Introduction” to the *Critique*

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<sup>53</sup> On the “First Introduction” in general, cf. the step-by-step retracing of its argument by Mertens (1975), although admittedly that text continually proves to be problematic, as I will note on occasion.

of the *Power of Judgment*, such laws must already be valid as a “subjectively necessary transcendental presupposition” because the power of judgment can only begin its reflective activity when it at least presumptively claims to have access to a universal under which it can subsume the particular in order to make it intelligible to the understanding (*FI*, 20:209).<sup>54</sup> The principle of the reflective judgment can, following Kant, be called a “maxim”<sup>55</sup> to the extent that maxims, according to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, represent nothing other than “subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object.”<sup>56</sup>

The “assumption” of an “objectively contingent but subjectively (for our faculty of cognition) necessary lawfulness” thus characterizes a presupposition of the activity of the reflective judgment, but not a condition of its objects, which the *Critique of Pure Reason* constantly conflated in its strategy of reasoning (*FI*, 20:243).<sup>57</sup> The reason is that the “lawfulness” that the reflective judgment has to assume ultimately unfolds into particular and specific laws that it has to posit for its objects in order to be able to subsume them to a universal. These laws are by no means objectively necessary in their concrete form, however. The reason is that they do not belong among the *a priori* conditions of the understanding, and are therefore not applied to appearances by the determining judgment. Consequently, unlike the *a priori* laws that are taken as a basis for the objectivity of the objects of cognition in this manner, they do not count as objective from the outset or in a necessary way. The claim that the assumption of particular laws is purely subjective, however, although occasionally suggested by Kant’s formulations, should only be accepted conditionally. That is, even these particular laws, as a “subjectively necessary transcendental presupposition” of the reflective judgment, must be characteristic both of the activity of cognition as well as of its objects, given that they correspond to the basic definition of the transcendental.<sup>58</sup> Admittedly, according to Kant, these laws, as a *presupposition*, are different from a transcendental *condition*, which is given *a priori*

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54 “And one can by no means charge such a principle to the account of experience, because only under the presupposition of it is it possible to organize experiences in a systematic way” (*FI*, 20:211).

55 *FI*, 20:205.

56 *CPR*, A 666/B 694

57 Cf., e.g., the concise statement on *CPR*, A 158/B 197; the argument is carried out primarily in the “Transcendental Deduction,” particularly *CPR*, A 106–111 and B 159–161.

58 The fact that the reflective judgment also implies a relationship to its objects is a central theme of the interpretation by Marc-Wogau (1938, in particular pp. 17–21). Admittedly, he equates the empirical qualification of the object of the reflective judgment with objective determination under the presupposition of the categories of the understanding in order to construct a dialectical tension that is more characteristic of his own reading than of Kant’s intentions.



and as independent of the empirical object and applied to appearances by the determining judgment, first and foremost in order to identify the objects of knowledge as objective. In the case of the reflective judgment, the appearance is indeed also subsumed to a law, but this law must be discovered and tested by way of the object. More precisely, it is assumed in the concrete operation of the reflective judgment in order to put it to the test empirically. It therefore represents a “contingent lawfulness” that is merely assumed, a lawfulness that does not determine the object objectively, but rather characterizes it, at least heuristically, as a concrete object of a specific disposition (*FI*, 20:243). Such an empirical lawfulness, existing according to presupposition, thus “qualifies” an appearance, as Kant predominantly puts it in the “First Introduction,” as an object of one specific form of empirical knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

As an example, consider Kant’s treatment of the organism. After all, this object of biological knowledge presupposes conditions that go beyond the *a priori* concepts of the understanding even if, as in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, they have been specified under the presupposition of the empirical concept of matter. Kant thus explains that “we must ground” the inner organization of the organism “in the concept of an end, even if we wish to employ only experience, i. e., observation in accordance with a principle suitable to their inner possibility” (*FI*, 20:235).<sup>60</sup> This does not, however, mean that the object would be determined objectively by having been generated in relation to a real purpose. The reason is that the purpose does not belong among the categories of the understanding, and therefore does not enter into the constitutive de-

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<sup>59</sup> Cf., e.g., *FI*, 20:209f. and 20:214. Citations with this formulation also follow on subsequent pages of the main text.

<sup>60</sup> In context: “But now we find among the products of nature special and very widely distributed genera, which contain within themselves a combination of efficient causes that we must ground in the concept of an end, even if we wish to employ only experience, i. e., observation in accordance with a principle suitable to their inner possibility. If we wished to judge their form and its possibility merely in accordance with mechanical laws, in which the idea of the effect must not be taken as the ground of the possibility of their cause, but vice versa, then it would be impossible to obtain even one experiential concept of the specific form of these natural things which would put us in the position to move from their inner disposition as cause to the effect, since the parts of these machines, not insofar as each has a separate ground of its possibility but rather only insofar as all together have a common ground, are the cause of the effect that is visible in them” (*FI*, 20:235f.).

“Hence I understand by an *absolute purposiveness* of natural forms such an external shape as well as inner structure that are so constituted that their possibility must be grounded in an idea of them in our power of judgment. For purposiveness is a lawfulness of the contingent as such” (*FI*, 20:217).

termination of the object.<sup>61</sup> It is and remains an assumption of the reflective judgment, by means of which the object is not determined as an organism objectively, but is rather regarded as such under the auspices of a “heuristic principle in the judgment” of nature (*FI*, 20:205). It is not *explained* in the sense of tracing its particularity back to the *a priori* and necessary determinations of experience as such; it is *judged* by reference to heuristic laws that are merely assumed. This distinction between two modes of relation of the object to its objectively determining or empirically qualifying laws and to the faculty of the determining or reflective judgment is introduced by Kant in a passage from the “First Introduction,” though admittedly he does not develop it into any consistent, distinct terminology.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the distinction that Kant sketches out between “explanation” and “judgment” also demonstrates the fact that the “subjective necessity” of an assumption of “objectively contingent” laws does not merely condition the subjective activity of the reflective judgment, but also relates the latter to the object of knowledge. It does not, however, link both as closely together as the *a priori*, and therefore simultaneously objectively and subjectively necessary, laws that permit the representation [*Vorstellung*] and the object to agree within

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61 “The concept of purposiveness is not a constitutive concept of experience at all, not a determination of an appearance belonging to an empirical *concept* of the object; for it is not a category” (*FI*, 20:219f.).

62 “The distinction between these two ways of judging natural beings [i.e., mechanical and technical, A.S.] is made merely by the reflecting power of judgment, which perfectly well can and perhaps even must allow to happen what the determining power of judgment (under principles of reason) would not concede with regard to the possibility of the objects themselves, and which would perhaps even like to know everything to be traced back to a mechanical sort of explanation; for it is entirely consistent that the explanation of an appearance, which is an affair of reason in accordance with objective principles of reason, be mechanical, while the rule for the judging of the same object, in accordance with subjective principles of reflection on it, should be technical” (*FI*, 20:218).

If the term “mechanism” here is sometimes attributed to the act of judging and the reflective judgment and at other times to explanation and the determining judgment, then these points of inclarity already suggest what sort of fundamental shifts are carried out in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. I will return to this point once more at the end of the discussion of Kant. On the act of “judging,” cf., e.g., *FI*, 20:200f. and 232f., among others. On the terminological meaning of “explanation” as a reduction to laws, cf. *CPR*, A 484/B 512 and Kant (1998b, p. 63): “For we can explain nothing but what we can reduce to laws the object of which can be given in some possible experience.” On the foundation of “physical explanation” in causality, cf. *CPR*, A 544f./B 572f. Notably, however, Kant often does not use the concept of explanation with any rigorously terminological clarity, as has also been observed by Löw; cf. Löw (1980, pp. 130f., including the corresponding note 24, and 192).

an objective reality. In the case of the particular empirical laws, their assumption is indeed necessary, but their validity and their existence, in contrast, are not guaranteed *a priori*. On the one hand, we can see here a gap in the *a priori* justification, but on the other hand we are also given space in which to bring the empirical aspects of cognition into play. That is, it must always be presupposed in empirical cognition that the assumptions that have been made, but which are unprovable, hold true. Nevertheless, they must be proven in the context of the objects. Whether this proof is successful, however, depends on the empirical objects that can either correspond to the assumptions or fail to match up with them. In the case of proving subjective assumptions, Kant speaks of the “purposiveness of nature in behalf of our faculty for cognizing it, insofar as for this it is required that we be able to judge the particular as contained under the general and subsume it under the concept of a nature” (*FI*, 20:202).<sup>63</sup>

The fact that this concept of purposiveness, to which I will return at a later point, is introduced in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is unmistakable evidence of a shift in the notion of the transcendental. With the “subjectively necessary transcendental *presupposition*” of the reflective judgment, the identification of transcendental and *a priori* conditions is relaxed for the first time, which ultimately has to raise the question of the empirical sides of the transcendental conditions of experience and its objects.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, this presupposition takes an important step towards dissolving the reduction of all natural sciences to the “pure part” of mathematical physics and instead towards taking into account the specific forms of knowledge in each case, i. e., the various disciplines, their characteristic methods, and their concretely qualified objects. Thirdly, this opening up of the transcendental to empirical and specific aspects of knowledge in the natural sciences is not limited to the well-known idea from the *Critique of Pure Reason* that an empirical content is subordinated to the *a priori* forms of the concepts of the understanding or intuition.<sup>65</sup> The reason is that the subjectively necessary presupposition of the reflective judgment refers to empirical laws that

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**63** The previous clause reads: “Thus if there is to be a concept or a rule which arises originally from the power of judgment, it would have to be a concept of things in nature insofar as nature conforms to our power of judgment, and thus a concept of a property of nature such that one cannot form any concept of it except that its arrangement conforms to our faculty for subsuming the particular given laws under more general ones even though these are not given; in other words, it would have to be the concept of a purposiveness of nature” (*FI*, 20:202). For a still worthwhile discussion of the concept of purposiveness, cf. Marc-Wogau (1938, pp. 44–89).

**64** On the close connection between the transcendental and the *a priori* character of conditions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cf. by way of example *CPR*, A 56f./B 80f.

**65** Cf. *CPR*, A 127f., B 164, and A 266–268/B 322–324.

are supposed to characterize the appearances that it seeks to comprehend even in their concrete form.<sup>66</sup> Thus, even on the level of form, the empirical side of cognition comes into play, since the transcendental conditions themselves, in their formal character, can be linked with the empirically specified experience.

For a more precise understanding of this emerging transformation of the transcendental in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, these few gestures towards a characterization of its point of departure are not sufficient. Rather, we must clarify what, precisely, the reflective judgment is presupposing with the particular laws and how the relation of empirical cognition to its specific objects is altered by that presupposition. To that end, we must pursue the course of Kant's argumentation in the "First Introduction" several steps further and include in the discussion the systematic character of experience.

## Systematicity and Particularity of Experience in the Activity of Judgment and Reason

The assumption of particular laws for specific objects by the reflective judgment must first be considered in light of the fact that, according to Kant, every objective cognition is essentially related to a lawful context in which the object stands and is determined as such. In the absence of such a context, the object would remain undetermined to the extent that it would be subjected to the arbitrary flux of the life of the imagination, without its properties, in their alteration over time, being able to refer to its persistent and objective identity. This train of thought, however, presupposes that the laws that determine the object constitute a unitary, coherent context or, using Kant's term, a system.<sup>67</sup> In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and in particular in the "First Introduction," this question of "experience as a system" is addressed, but does not refer primarily to the *a priori* laws of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which, according to Kant, already constitute a system for analytic reasons (*FI*, 20:204, n.).<sup>68</sup> Rather, it is now direct-

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<sup>66</sup> Kant still seems to be avoiding this consequence in the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic," which I will address momentarily; cf. *CPR*, A 653f./B 681f.

<sup>67</sup> On the concept of the system in Kant, cf. *CPR*, A 645–647/B 673–675, A 680–682/B 708–710, and A 832f./B 860f.

<sup>68</sup> "Now these empirical cognitions constitute, in accordance with what they necessarily have in common (namely those transcendental laws of nature), an analytic unity of all experience, but not that synthetic unity of experience as a system in which the empirical laws, even with regard to what is different in them (and where their multiplicity can go on to infinitude), are bound together under a principle" (*FI*, 20:203f., n.).

ed towards the empirical laws that arise from the activity of the reflective judgment, and is therefore conceived of as a question of “experience *as a system in accordance with empirical laws*” (*FI*, 20:203).<sup>69</sup> This doubling of the question of the system of laws corresponds, on the one hand, to the two natures of the objects of knowledge appealed to above, namely in terms of their most universal and necessary determination in the sense of transcendental nature and by reference to their concrete empirical determination, which is not determined *a priori*, within the framework of a nature that has already been specified.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, however, the question of the “*system in accordance with empirical laws*” reveals a new aspect of the activity of the reflective judgment: the latter does not merely have to discover specific and empirical laws under which the concrete object and experience thereof can be subsumed, but rather simultaneously to attempt to establish their systematic connection.

Consequently, the activity of the reflective judgment involves two closely linked, but nevertheless distinguishable tasks. Namely, these two tasks are distinguished by the fact that, in the first case, “particular experiences” represent the point of departure for seeking out the empirical laws that are appropriate to them, but in the other case such laws are already given and must be unified into a coherent whole (*FI*, 20:203). Kant himself repeatedly suggests that these two aspects of the activity of the reflective judgment must be kept apart,<sup>71</sup> and he emphasizes each of them in turn in its own section of the “First Introduction.”<sup>72</sup> Admittedly, his formulations also repeatedly conflate these two distinguishable tasks in a confusing way.<sup>73</sup> The reason for this fact is that the purpose of the systematic context of empirical laws is to determine the objects of knowl-

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<sup>69</sup> Mertens (1975, p. 75) also understands the approach to this system as a “central theme” of the whole “First Introduction.” Unfortunately, she refrains from reflecting sufficiently on the difference between form and content in terms of its relation to the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, instead interpreting the specific nature of things uncritically and too hastily in terms of a simple realism; cf. Mertens (1975, pp. 75–83 and 90–93). The productive consequences of Kant’s new approach can then only appear in a merely negative manner, as a “fluctuation between subjectivity and objectivity” (Mertens 1975, p. 92).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the most illuminating paragraphs in *FI*, 20:199 ff.

<sup>71</sup> “For by groping about among forms of nature whose agreement with each other under common empirical but higher laws appeared entirely contingent to the power of judgment, it would be even more contingent if particular perceptions were luckily to be qualified for an empirical law; it would be all the more contingent if multiple empirical laws were to fit into a systematic unity of the cognition of nature in a possible experience in their entire interconnection without presupposing such a form in nature through an *a priori* principle” (*FI*, 20:210).

<sup>72</sup> That is, the sections “IV. On experience as a system for the power of judgment” and “V. On the reflecting power of judgment.”

<sup>73</sup> This is also the claim of Henry E. Allison (2000, p. 83).

edge as completely as possible in order to comprehend thusly the particular with which the reflection of judgment begins. The reflective judgment thus circulates between this “particular experience” that demands its activity and “experience *as a system in accordance with empirical laws*,” within which the former is supposed to be comprehended. It thus expresses a tension between universal and particular that will have consequences for the transformation of the transcendent in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

Kant explains the systematic character of experience in the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by way of discussing the “logical form of a system,” also sketching out the notion of a system briefly as a “classification” into “genera” and “species” (*FI*, 20:214f.). According to Kant, such a classification is based on the “comparison of empirical representations in order to cognize empirical laws in natural things and specific forms matching these, which however through their comparison with others are also generically corresponding forms” (*FI*, 20:213). Apparently, what he has in mind in this context is the task of natural description, and in particular Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae*, which here – unlike in many other passages where it stands in the background as a significant example – is at least mentioned in a handwritten note.<sup>74</sup> The systematic unity of such a classification consists, as Kant suggests in the cited passage, essentially in a nesting of hierarchically ranked concepts: every concept is assigned to a higher concept, sharing characteristics with all

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74 “Could Linnaeus have hoped to outline a system of nature if he had had to worry that if he found a stone that he called granite, this might differ in its internal constitution from every other stone which nevertheless looked just like it, and all he could hope to find were always individual things, as it were isolated for the understanding, and never a class of them that could be brought under concepts of genus and species[?]” (*FI*, 20:216, n.).

As this quotation attests, concepts like species and genus do not have to “refer primarily to the biological,” as noted by Heimsoeth (1970, p. 20, n. 53). In this passage, however, it is more important that Kant refers to the classifications of natural description in the sense used by Linnaeus, which might well be the decisive example for the “First Introduction.” For this reason, Larson (1994, pp. 172ff.) also bases his depiction of Kant’s role in the development of knowledge concerning living forms in the 18th century on this text. Even the editor of the text, Gerhard Lehmann, points out in his introduction: “In the *first* introduction, the problem of classification as such comes into focus more sharply ... the appeal to Linnaeus makes it clear that Kant was thinking of Linnaeus’ *Systema*” (Kant 1927, pp. XIII–XXI, here p. XIX). He is all the more infuriated due to the fact that Otto Buek, the editor of the text in the context of Cassirer’s edition of Kant’s *Werke*, made here a curious mistake: “He [Buek, A.S.] somehow contrives [!] to read the word ‘Linnaeus’ in the note on p. 22 as ‘Timaeus!’” (Kant 1927, p. IX, n.).

Cf. further mentions of Linnaeus, e.g., in *CPI*, 5:427, and in his “On the use of teleological principles in philosophy,” *AHE*, 8:161 and 8:164, n. Cf. also the evidence in Kant’s late work given by Heimsoeth (1969, p. 589, n. 260).

other concepts that are dependent thereon, and distinguishes itself from those concepts by means of at least one additional attribute. Such a depiction of the classification of living forms has philosophical roots reaching back to Aristotle, to whom Kant refers briefly in a note,<sup>75</sup> and it was probably also this Aristotelian tradition that formed the conceptual background for efforts towards a classification of “natural forms” up to Linnaeus.<sup>76</sup> Kant is now interested neither in the concrete example of Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae* nor, in a systematic respect, in the practical difficulties of such a project, which can be seen, for one, in the determination of the characteristics permitting a consistent classification in accordance with the observations as such.<sup>77</sup> Instead, he focuses his efforts on the question of the justification of such a classification.

Against the backdrop of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we must first accept in this context the fact that the possibility of such a classification cannot be justified *a priori* in light of the multiplicity of nature. Rather, it represents an indispensable assumption for the activity of the reflective judgment and for empirical knowledge. This assumption can, but by no means must, be guaranteed “if, namely, as is quite possible in itself (at least as far as the understanding can make out *a priori*), the multiplicity and diversity of these laws, along with the natural forms corresponding to them, being infinitely great, were to present to us a raw chaotic aggregate and not the least trace of a system, even though we must presuppose such a system in accordance with transcendental laws” (*FI*, 20:209).<sup>78</sup> What is understood here by the term “transcendental laws,” as

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75 Cf. *FI*, 20:215, n. Alongside the “Aristotelian school,” however, Kant also mentions “jurists” – this point must be pursued further.

76 Cf. once again Larson (1971, pp. 20–25 and 46–49, as well as, with respect to Linnaeus in particular, pp. 143–151).

77 Larson (1994, pp. 28–60) provides an informative look at the practical difficulties of the classification of living forms in the 18th century.

78 In another passage, he writes: “For although experience [as a *system in accordance with empirical laws*, A.S.] constitutes a system in accordance with *transcendental laws*, which contain the condition of the possibility of experience in general, there is still possible such an *infinite multiplicity* of empirical laws and such a *great heterogeneity of forms of nature*, which would belong to particular experience, that the concept of a system in accordance with these (empirical) laws must be entirely alien to the understanding, and neither the possibility, let alone the necessity, of such a whole can be conceived. Nevertheless particular experience, thoroughly interconnected in accordance with constant principles, also requires this systematic interconnection of empirical laws, whereby it becomes possible for the power of judgment to subsume the particular under the general, however empirical it may be, and so on, right up to the highest empirical laws and the forms of nature corresponding to them, and thus to regard the *aggregate* of particular experiences as a system of them; for without this presupposition no thoroughly law-

Kant explains immediately thereafter, is, in turn, only “a subjectively necessary transcendental *presupposition*,” according to which, namely, “such a disturbingly unbounded diversity of empirical laws and heterogeneity of natural forms does not pertain to nature, rather that nature itself, through the affinity of particular laws under more general ones, qualifies for an experience, as an empirical system” (*FI*, 20:209).

The reflective judgment, under the presupposition of such a systematic context of experience, will simultaneously attempt to subsume the particular experience under its own empirical laws and to bring together these laws “under higher, though still empirical laws” (*FI*, 20:210). A passage from the “First Introduction” makes these efforts on the part of the “*logical use of the power of judgment*,” on the foundation of its “transcendental principle,” to regard “nature *a priori* as qualified for a *logical system* of its multiplicity under empirical laws,” particularly apparent, and it also indicates first and foremost the specificity of this task (*FI*, 20:214). Already apparent at the point of departure of this account of a systematization of the particular is the fact that these efforts on the part of the reflective judgment proceed simultaneously in two complementary directions. On the one hand, Kant speaks of “classification” as “the division of given general concepts” – among which numbers in particular “nature as such” – “by means of which one thinks the particular (here the empirical) with its variety as contained under the general, in accordance with a certain principle” (*FI*, 20:214). On the other hand, Kant suggests how, in its activity, the reflective judgment “ascends from the particular to the general,” in which context he mentions the “comparison” of classes of the same rank and their “subsumption” under higher classes as elementary operations (*FI*, 20:214).<sup>79</sup> These two movements of ascent and descent in the conceptual hierarchy seem to supplement one another for the purpose of comprehending nothing other than “the particular (here the empirical)” in terms of a “division ... of concepts.”

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like interconnection, i.e., empirical unity of these experiences can obtain” (*FI*, 20:203). Cf. also the similar passage in *CPI*, 5:186 ff.

**79** I will once again reproduce this passage in context: “The logical form of a system consists merely in the division of given general concepts (of the sort which that of a nature in general is here), by means of which one thinks the particular (here the empirical) with its variety as contained under the general, in accordance with a certain principle. To this there belongs, if one proceeds empirically and ascends from the particular to the general, a *classification* of the manifold, i.e., a comparison with each other of several classes, each of which stands under a determinate concept, and, if they are complete with regard to the common characteristic, their subsumption under higher classes (genera), until one reaches the concept that contains the principle of the entire classification (and which constitutes the highest genus)” (*FI*, 20:214).



The question of how this relationship between universal concepts and particular, empirical objects should be understood more precisely, however, has not yet been answered completely. After Kant has characterized in brief the ascent from the particular, he emphasizes in the following lines the complementary movement and characterizes the attempt to “think” the “particular as contained under the general” as an operation of “specification”: “If, on the contrary, one begins with the general concept, in order to descend to the particular through a complete division, then the action is called the *specification* of the manifold under a given concept, since the progression is from the highest genus to lower (subgenera or species) and from species to subspecies. This would be expressed more correctly if, instead of saying (as in common usage) that one must specify the particular which stands under a general concept, it were instead said that one *specifies the general concept* by adducing the manifold under it. For the genus is (considered logically) as it were the matter, or the raw substratum, which nature works up into particular species and subspecies through various determinations, and thus it can be said, in analogy with the use of this word by jurists, when they speak of the specification of certain raw materials, that *nature specifies itself* in accordance with a certain principle (or the idea of a system)” (*FI*, 20:214f.).

This characterization of specification initially, on the basis of its point of departure in the “general concept” and the indicated direction of descent “to the particular through a complete division,” emphasizes the fact that this operation leads from concept to concept, namely from the more general and more comprehensive to the narrower, but also more concrete and substantial concept. This operation thus neither begins from something particular that would be worth specifying, nor is it ultimately guaranteed to lead to something particular. To the extent, however, that the particular is processed “into particular species and subspecies,” it seems to be understood as part of the “logical form of a system” of experience (*FI*, 20:214f.). And so we can say that “*nature specifies itself* in accordance with a certain principle (or the idea of a system).” This “idea of a system,” however, only expresses the assumption that the reflective judgment has to presuppose and which orients its activity towards a goal. For that reason, the passage under consideration here also leads into the formulation of the heuristic principle of the reflective judgment, namely that it “could not undertake to *classify* the whole of nature according to its empirical differences if it did not presuppose that nature itself

*specifies* its transcendental laws in accordance with some sort of principle” (*FI*, 20:215).<sup>80</sup>

These and similar formulations concerning the “special principle of the power of judgment” denote, first and foremost, its necessary assumption, and not so much its idiosyncratic activity (*FI*, 20:216).<sup>81</sup> The reason is that this “idea of a system” brings to the fore one aspect, the specification of the general concept, while the second aspect, reflection on the concept by beginning with the particular, as it were, in anticipation of the goal of the reflective activity of judgment, seems to be hidden. This misinterpretation is made even easier by the fact that Kant, in the course of his argumentation, seems to be relying on the model of the “hypothetical use of reason” from the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPR*, A 647/B 675).<sup>82</sup> The hypothetical use of reason has thus often been viewed as a “precursor” to the reflective judgment, or even identified with it, thus overlooking the essential systematic innovations of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>83</sup> The activities of the reflective judgment and of the hypothetical use of reason can, however, be distinguished quite rigorously on closer consideration.<sup>84</sup>

For the time being, however, the parallels are initially unmistakable. After Kant, in the “Transcendental Dialectic,” has discussed all the unproductive problems into which cognition has been led by the ideas of reason, he devotes himself in the “Appendix” to a “good and consequently *immanent* use” of the ideas (*CPR*, A 643/B 671). This use depends on the insight that reason is never itself capable of referring to objects or even identifying them, but rather exercises its influence on the understanding and can only contribute to cognition in such a

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**80** At the beginning of the subsequent section of the “First Introduction,” Kant reiterates: “That nature in its empirical laws should specify itself as is requisite for a possible experience, *as a system of empirical cognition* – this form of nature contains a logical purposiveness, namely of its conformity to the subjective conditions of the power of judgment with regard to the possible interconnection of empirical concepts in the whole of an experience” (*FI*, 20:217). In addition, cf. *FI*, 20:243f.

**81** Kant reformulates this principle here as follows: “*Nature specifies its general laws into empirical ones, in accordance with the form of a logical system, in behalf of the power of judgment*” (*FI*, 20:216).

**82** Cf. the whole passage in *CPR*, A 642–668/B 670–696.

**83** This, for a classic example, is the contention of August Stadler (1874, pp. 35–43), but also of Buchdahl (1981, p. 101) and Friedman (1992b, pp. 243f. and 251–253).

**84** On the following, cf. also the worthwhile comparative reading by Paul Guyer (1990), which is essentially based on these same texts, but which has other points of emphasis and thus fills in additional considerations. Guyer discusses primarily the question of whether Kant considers the systematicity of empirical laws to be a transcendental condition for the possibility of experience as such.

manner.<sup>85</sup> The goal of such a “regulative use” of the ideas is to orient the activity of the understanding and the continued existence of its cognition towards “the *systematic* in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle” (*CPR*, A 644/B 672).<sup>86</sup> Kant thus also defines reason as “the faculty of deriving the particular from the universal,” in which context he, in analogy to the differentiation of the determining and the reflective judgment, distinguishes two tasks, namely the “‘apodictic’ use of reason” when “the universal is *in itself certain* and given” and its “hypothetical use” when this is not the case (*CPR*, A 646 f./B 674 f.).

The parallels between the hypothetical use of reason and the activity of the reflective judgment are clear and go beyond these basic provisions.<sup>87</sup> It is not merely that this use is “not properly *constitutive*”<sup>88</sup> with respect to things and follows only “heuristic principles,”<sup>89</sup> which Kant, as in the later “First Introduction,” characterizes as solely “subjective principles” and therefore terms “*maxims*.”<sup>90</sup> The concrete form adopted by the system of experience being pursued is, in turn, that of classification, which Kant describes as a philosophical “scholastic rule or logical principle, without which there could be no use of reason, because we can infer from the universal to the particular only on the ground of the universal properties of things under which the particular properties stand” (*CPR*, A 652/B 680). Moreover, this “logical principle” is quite closely related to the empirical knowledge of the “students of nature,” and thus to the un-

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**85** Cf. *CPR*, A 643 f./B 671 f.

**86** The passage continues: “This unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding’s cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws” (*CPR*, A 645/B 673).

**87** In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, admittedly, the power of judgment appears only as the determining judgment, as the passage consulted here makes particularly clear, and in this context it has an impact only on the side of the apodictic use of reason: “If reason is the faculty of deriving the particular from the universal, then: Either the universal is *in itself certain* and given, and only *judgment* is required for subsuming, and the particular is necessarily determined through it” (*CPR*, A 646/B 674).

**88** *CPR*, A 647/B 675.

**89** *CPR*, A 663/ B 691.

**90** *CPR*, A 666/B 694. Cf. also as early as the beginning of the “Transcendental Dialectic” on *CPR*, A 297/B 353. Granted, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is even less clear about what is involved in the objective claim of subjective principles when he conflates “subjectively necessary assumptions” with a questionable “objective but indeterminate validity” that is supposed to be grounded, in a mediated relation to reason, on the objects of cognition beyond the understanding, as in *CPR*, A 663–666/B 691–694. Cf. also *CPR*, A 650 f./B 678 f. and A 654/B 682.

derlying problem of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as becomes clear in the numerous examples taken from the natural sciences,<sup>91</sup> but also in the paradigmatic terminology of classification (*CPR*, A 655/B 683).<sup>92</sup>

In this context, Kant describes how a systematic classification is to be conceived of in more detail than in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its “First Introduction.” He views it as a system of empirical knowledge that is articulated, i.e., simultaneously differentiated and unitary, as possible in itself, a system that stands in accordance with the “idea of the *maximum* of division and unification of the understanding’s cognition in one principle” (*CPR*, A 665/B 694). On Kant’s analysis, it comes about by way of two different tendencies of reason that are set in opposition to one another – thus, on the one hand, in accordance with the “logical principle of genera,” it begins with the “*same-ness of kind*” within the particular and ascends to the universal, while nevertheless, on the other hand, according to the principle of “*species*,” simultaneously aiming at the “*variety* of what is same in kind” and attempting to derive the specific differences (*CPR*, A 654/B 682 and A 657/B 685).<sup>93</sup> Thus, corresponding to these principles of a systematic ordering of concepts is always the assumption of the correlative disposition of the objects of experience, namely the “*law of specification*”<sup>94</sup> and the “*law of homogeneity*” of their forms.<sup>95</sup>

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91 On chemistry, cf. *CPR*, A 646/B 674, A 652f./B 680f., and A 657/B685; on biology, cf. *CPR*, A 667f./B 695f.; and on the “systematic representation of the manifoldness of powers” via the hypothetical assumption of a “single radical, i.e., absolutely fundamental, power,” cf. *CPR*, A 648–651/B 676–679, but also Kant’s statements on the question of teleology in *CPR*, A 686–694/B 714–722. For a discussion of the examples, cf. Heimsoeth (1969, pp. 560–564, 570–575, 588–592, and 597–601).

92 This is also the claim of Heimsoeth (1969, pp. 588f.) in reference to the “nearest example to Kant’s mind,” namely the “system of classification used by the natural scientist in the vein of Linnaeus.”

93 “[...] here reason shows two interests that conflict with each other: on the one side, an interest in the *domain* (universality) in regard to genera, on the other an interest in *content* (determinacy) in respect of the manifoldness of species; for in the first case the understanding thinks much *under* its concepts, while in the second it thinks all the more *in them*” (*CPR*, A 654/B 682).

While reason unifies both conflicting tendencies, the “students of nature” must constantly embody one in particular in order to be neither “chiefly speculative” nor “empirical minds,” as Kant notes immediately thereafter. Something similar holds for the “sophistical reasoner”; cf. *CPR*, A 666f./B 694f. Beyond that, cf. Kant’s detailed analysis of the two tendencies, particularly in light of the “*affinity* of all concepts” or the “*continuity* of forms” that have been omitted in my depiction, on *CPR*, A 651–661/B 679–689.

94 *CPR*, A 656/B 684.

95 *CPR*, A 659/B 687.

This description, even at a terminological level, gives the reader the impression that it has something to do with an anticipation of the task of the reflective judgment. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to preserve the differences. Initially, what is essential is the fact that the power of judgment and reason occupy very different positions in Kant's topology of the faculties. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, intuition, understanding, and reason form a series in which the conceptual synthesis by way of the understanding and the rational ordering of its cognitions are built on top of the intuitable representation of an individual object.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, reason never refers to objects, but rather relies on the objective cognition that the understanding has already brought into being.<sup>97</sup> The task of reason is to order these cognitions of the understanding and to direct their further development. In contrast, already in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the power of judgment mediates between the intuition of individual objects and the general concepts of the understanding by schematizing these concepts and subsuming the intuitions to them.<sup>98</sup> While reason thus only has to do with objects to the extent that they already stand under concepts, and it therefore operates solely in terms of the conceptual ordering of deductions and derivations,<sup>99</sup> the power of judgment relates concepts to individual intuitions, chiefly in order to produce a relation between these two independent sources of experience via the subsumption of those intuitions. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the latter task was constantly held to the standard of a concept given *a priori* by the understanding, a concept which was supposed to be applied to an intuition or to which such an intuition was worth providing, whereas the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* emphasizes the necessity of finding an empirical concept for an *a priori* indeterminate determination of objects. The power of judgment thus has to do with the synthesis of concept and intuition, and consequently with the production of knowledge. The introduction of its reflective activity, furthermore, takes into account the specific form of biological knowledge, which is why it distinguishes itself from the determining judgment and its paradigm of knowledge in physics. In contrast, reason does not represent its own form of

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**96** "Thus all human cognition begins with intuitions, goes from there to concepts, and ends with ideas" (*CPR*, A 702/B 708).

**97** Cf., e.g., *CPR*, A 302/B 359, A 305–307/B 362–364, and A 680/B 708.

**98** On the other hand, however, the power of judgment also mediates between understanding and reason by subsuming concepts and cognitions under the rules of the understanding as well as its conditions, and it thereby paves the way for the deductions of reason; cf. e.g., *CPR*, A 304f./B 360f. and A 330/B 386f. I will not consider this aspect in what follows for the sake of simplicity.

**99** On derivation by reason, cf., by way of example, *CPR*, A 651f./B 679f.

knowledge, because it has no direct and independent relation whatsoever to the objects whose systematic unity it is supposed to form.<sup>100</sup>

Consequently, reason and judgment are concerned with the particular and the universal each in its own way, because they either conclude in concepts or relate concepts to intuitions. Thus, in the “First Introduction,” Kant distinguishes the power of judgment, understood as the “faculty for the *subsumption of the particular* under the general,” from reason, understood as the “faculty for the *determination* of the particular through the general (for the derivation from principles)” (*FI*, 20:201).<sup>101</sup> As this conceptual differentiation between subsumption and derivation indicates, “the particular” must also be distinguished for both faculties. For reason, the particular can only be such to the extent that it is already grasped conceptually and can be derived from higher laws by way of deductions, whether the latter are now presumed or given.<sup>102</sup> This particular must itself therefore be something conceptual, since every “specification,” as Kant explains in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Deduction,” leads to conceptual species, subspecies, sub-subspecies, and so on – but never to a “thoroughly determined” concept that would refer exclusively to an “individual” (*CPR*, A 655 f./B 683 f.).<sup>103</sup> In the “First Introduction,” in contrast, Kant has a different emphasis when he clarifies that what is specified in the strict sense is not “the particular which stands under a general concept,” but rather “that one *specifies the general concept* by adducing the manifold under it” (*FI*, 20:215). It is not merely that, in so doing, specification breaks away from subsumption, but rather that it is also, by way of the “manifold,” related to the “*particular perceptions*” with which the reflective judgment begins and for which it attempts to find an adequate concept, always under the presupposition that these perceptions “were luckily to be qualified for an empirical law” (*FI*, 20:210). Accordingly, the reflective judg-

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**100** Philippe Huneman (2007, in particular pp. 87 f. and 90 f.) arrives at a similar assessment of the systematic difference between the hypothetical use of reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the reflective activity of the power of judgment in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. His discussion, taking place in the context of the philosophy of science, attributes the decisive influence for this systematic shift to the then-contemporary development of biology, since in particular the works of Caspar Wolff on the development of chicken embryos, which were directed against Haller’s preformationism, would have shown Kant a way out of his difficulties with the concept of purpose, which extended back into his pre-critical phase.

**101** For the sake of completeness, it should be added that the understanding is defined in a corresponding way as the “faculty for the cognition of the general (of rules)” (*FI*, 20:201); cf. also *FI*, 20:209 f.

**102** This point holds already for Kant’s definition of reason as the “faculty of deriving the particular from the universal” (*CPR*, A 646/B 674); cf. also the subsequent paragraphs.

**103** Cf. also *CPR*, A 658 f./B686 f.

ment deals with a different particular than reason, namely one which is given in intuition and which by definition represents something individual.<sup>104</sup>

This subtle difference between the particular that is *derived* from a principle and structured *conceptually* and the particular that is given in *intuition* and which is to be *subsumed* by a concept must be taken into account if we are to describe the activity of the reflective judgment. The reason is that the particular that belongs to it cannot be reduced to the specification of a concept, because it is related to an intuition and attempts first and foremost to relate this intuition to a concept. It is therefore worth avoiding the idealization of this particularity in favor of its derivation from principles by recourse to the hypothetical use of reason and thereby misunderstanding the innovative shift towards empirical knowledge that is signified by the introduction of reflective activity in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. At the same time, however, we must include in our considerations the fact that the reflective judgment, in its task of producing the systematic ordering of empirical concepts and laws, exhibits a certain affinity for the hypothetical use of reason and is also concerned with the conceptual specification of a particular that might be adequate to the empirical object. The particular that it, like reason, can derive from a highest principle and the particular in perception, for which it is supposed to find an empirical law, therefore delineate the two poles between which the reflective judgment swings in its activity, attempting to bring them closer together. It will, however, never be able to identify them with one another, because Kant rejects the possibility of a “thoroughly determined” concept and therefore cannot account for any concept of a particular that is given in perception.

In order to understand the reflective judgment, therefore, the difference between the particular with which it, with the help of intuition, begins and the particular that it, like reason, attempts to specify from concepts remains relevant. This difference is demonstrated once again in Kant’s striking use of two prepositions. As already established, reason never refers to objects directly, assuming that it, enlightened by Kant’s *Critique*, abstains from inventing for itself transcendent and illusory objects beyond experience – such as self, world, and God. Kant sees the positive task of these ideas of reason in their use as “regulative principles” for bringing the cognitions of the understanding into a systematic order.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, this regulative use of the ideas refrains from conceiving of self, God, and world as objects that exist in themselves. Instead, they are understood

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**104** Cf. *CPR*, A 320/B 376f., as well as the classical definition of intuition as a “*singular representation (repraesentatio singularis)*” from the so-called “Jäsche Logic,” *LL*, 9:91.

**105** On what follows, cf. “On the final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason” in *CPR*, especially A 699 ff./B697 ff.

as an “object in the idea and not in reality,”<sup>106</sup> as “[s]omething in the idea, of which we have no concept of what it is *in itself*.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, this “immanent use” initially renders the transcendent object into a mere idea, but it simultaneously modifies the reference to the objects of empirical experience. Reason, in its business of ensuring the systematic unity of the cognitions of the understanding, is initially related by way of the understanding to the objects of its cognitions, in which the intuition has already been synthesized conceptually. Now, however, under the “presupposition of such an *object in the idea*,” it portrays them in the context of a systematic unity at which this idea aims (*CPR*, A 671/B 699). Put differently, it also represents the “object in the idea” that is given by the understanding to the extent that it derives that object, understood as something particular, from the highest principle of this systematic unity.

This second interpretation of Kant’s formulation may, as I by no means want to conceal, hardly reflect his intent, but it certainly does match up with the point of his argumentation.<sup>108</sup> That is, the regulative use of the idea is correlated in two respects with the notion of an “object” being understood “*in the idea*”: the transcendent object is modified into a mere idea; but at the same time all empirical objects are also transposed into this idea, insofar as they are taken into consideration in the context of the systematic unity that the idea of reason promises to supply in each case.<sup>109</sup> The ideas of self, world, and above all God are thus used

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**106** *CPR*, A 697f./B 725f.

**107** *CPR*, A 679/B 707.

**108** This point can be explained primarily by way of the idea of a “divine being.” Thus, Kant also, with respect to the regulative use by reason of the idea of a “divine being,” speaks of the fact that “it is reason’s speculative interest and not its insight which justifies it in starting from a point lying so far beyond its sphere in order to consider its objects in one complete whole” (*CPR*, A 676/B 704). Several pages later, Kant expresses the same state of affairs as follows: “But reason cannot think this systematic unity in any other way than by giving its idea an object, which, however, cannot be given through any experience; for experience never gives an example of perfect systematic unity. Now this being of reason (*ens rationis ratiocinatae*) is, to be sure, a mere idea, and is therefore not assumed absolutely and *in itself* as something actual, but is rather taken as a ground only problematically (because we cannot reach it through any concepts of the understanding), so as to regard all the connection of things in the world of sense as if they had their ground in this being of reason; but solely with the intention of grounding on it the systematic unity that is indispensable to reason and conducive in every way to empirical cognition of the understanding but can never be obstructive to it” (*CPR*, A 680/B 708).

**109** “It makes a big difference whether something is given to my reason as *an object absolutely* or is given only as an *object in the idea*. In the first case my concepts go as far as determining the object; but in the second, there is really only a schema for which no object is given, not even hypothetically, but which serves only to represent other objects to us, in accordance with their systematic unity, by means of the relation to this idea, hence to represent these objects in-



in an immanent manner with respect to the understanding, in that all empirical objects are taken into consideration in light of the unity of reason, thereby creating a notion of “experience as a system,” in which everything particular would be included as something that has been specified conceptually. We are dealing with, albeit hypothetical, “cognition from principles,” because “I cognize the particular *in* the universal through concepts” (*CPR*, A 300/B 357, emphasis added). The preposition “in” is thus characteristic of the regulative use of reason to the extent that it considers the particular from the outset under the auspices of the universal and inscribes it, as the specification thereof, into a hypothetical system of the concept. The reflective activity of the power of judgment certainly seems to be pursuing a similar *telos* in the “First Introduction” when it supposes that “*nature specifies itself* in accordance with a certain principle (or the idea of a system).” Its point of departure, however, is given by perception, which is why it is valid at all to discover something universal, an empirical law, that incorporates this particular alongside others. Thus, for the reflective judgment, the particular is not grasped *in* the idea of the universal; it must attempt to apprehend the universal *in the context of* the particular.<sup>110</sup> Kant thus, in the “First Introduction,” expresses in a variety of different ways the manner in which the universal, in the form of the empirical law, only becomes apparent *in the context of* the object.<sup>111</sup> The particular with which the reflective judgment

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directly” (*CPR*, A 670/B 698). Kant describes this function of the idea in analogy to the schematism of the concepts of the understanding, which is certainly worthy of further discussion at this juncture, but which would lead too far afield in the present context; cf. *CPR*, A 664–666/B 692–694.

**110** That is, “*am Besonderen*,” rather than “*in der Idee des Allgemeinen*.” This difference between the prepositions *an* and *in* is much clearer in the original German. For the sake of clarity in the English translation, I will generally translate *an* as “in the context of” where it is relevant to this discussion. -Trans.

**111** The reflective judgment thus has as its goal in general the task of cognizing “empirical laws in natural things and *specific* forms matching these, which however through their comparison with others are also *generically corresponding* forms” (*FI*, 20:213). What holds true for its teleological judgment in particular, however, is the “purposiveness in things in nature” (*FI*, 20:232) or the “objective purposiveness observed in things in nature (especially in organized beings)” (*FI*, 20:228). This reflective activity “makes it possible, indeed necessary, to conceive in nature, over and above its mechanical necessity, a purposiveness” (*FI*, 20:219). This formulation also persists throughout the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; cf., e.g., *CPJ*, 5:181 f., 5:188 ff., 5:221, et al. In particular, one passage there elucidates how the “principle for judging” should be apprehended, terminologically speaking, only “in the form of a thing”: “The fundamental transcendental principle, however, for representing a purposiveness of nature in subjective relation to our faculty of cognition in the form of a thing as a principle for judging it leaves it entirely undetermined where and in which cases I have to undertake the judging of this form as that of a product in

begins and which its search for a universal demands first and foremost should not, therefore, be included in the idea in the way that reason attempts, but rather opens up a relation to something universal that is not prescribed *a priori*, but which nevertheless must be assumed in order to comprehend the particular heuristically. The problem of the “universal” for the “particular” is thus not dissolved in the specification of a presumed principle into ultimate “particular experiences.”

## The Revisions of the Critique of the Power of Judgment and its Background in the History of Science

These differences between the relation of the universal and the particular according to the model of the hypothetical use of reason and in the task of the reflective judgment have, as can be assumed for good reason, a concrete background in the history of science. That is, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Kant is influenced by the development that physics had undergone from Galileo, through Kepler, and up to Newton. Kant understood this development as a paradigmatic systematization of knowledge in physics, since Newton’s *Principia* does not merely bring together Galileo’s laws of falling bodies and Kepler’s laws of planetary motion in mathematical form. It also allows for the derivation of those laws from the fundamental force of gravitation, which presupposes Galileo’s mathematization of motion in the form of an equation outlining a curve of points.<sup>112</sup> The *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in which Kant by no means follows Newton’s philosophical-meta-

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accordance with a principle of purposiveness and not rather merely in accordance with general laws of nature, and leaves it to the aesthetic power of judgment to make out, in taste, the suitability of the thing (of its form) to our cognitive faculties (insofar as these decide not through correspondence with concepts but through feeling). By contrast, the teleologically employed power of judgment provides the determinate conditions under which something (e.g., an organized body), is to be judged in accordance with the idea of an end of nature; but it cannot adduce any fundamental principle from the concept of nature, as object of experience, that would warrant ascribing to it *a priori* a relation to ends or even warrant merely indeterminately assuming anything of the sort about the actual experience of such products: the reason for which is that many particular experiences must be arranged and considered under the unity of their principle in order to be able to cognize even empirically an objective purposiveness in a particular object” (*CPI*, 5:194).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. once again *CPR*, A 662f./B 690f., and additionally, with numerous other proofs, Heimsoeth (1970, pp. 10–35, in particular pp. 30f.).

physical views, is also based on such a systematization in the form of derivation from one principle.<sup>113</sup>

In contrast, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the systematizing character of empirical knowledge is dealt with primarily in terms of the example of classification within the domain of “natural forms,” based particularly on Linnaeus’ taxonomies.<sup>114</sup> The practical and conceptual problem area of this systematization, however, is completely different. The reason is that, in this case, what matters first is to choose characteristics that can be identified consistently and unambiguously within individual empirical natural forms and which permit them to be attributed to genera and species. As a result, it should be possible to create a classification forming a tiered and coherent system of orders, classes, genera, species, and varieties, with different problems being posed at each level.<sup>115</sup> The first point of departure and the ultimate standard of these efforts, however, is the determinacy of individual natural forms: they appeared to be given from the outset and were supposed to be apprehended in an appropriate way. Classification, therefore, even in terms of its technical character, should always be conceived of in relation to the appearance of natural forms and, in the case of Linnaeus’ system of plants, in light of their habitus.<sup>116</sup>

Kant was perfectly familiar with this initial situation of classification, even if he hardly had to deal with the practical difficulties of classification himself. In contrast, he does enter into the discussion concerning the objective determination and epistemological status of biological genera and species that had developed following critical objections by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Namely, with respect to Linnaeus’ classifications, Buffon had raised the question of to what extent the division of genera and species has a purely logical-conceptual, and consequently an artificial character, or whether it had as its foundation

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**113** The way in which Kant’s strict orientation on the model of Newton’s physics accompanies his novel philosophical understanding of that physics under his own premises is demonstrated by way of example by Friedman (1990, in particular pp. 197–202).

**114** Cf. Heimsoeth (1970, pp. 77–79), who nevertheless does not address the systematic differences sketched out here.

**115** On this point, cf. once again Larson (1971, pp. 50–121).

**116** On this point, cf. Larson (1971, pp. 62–65 and 71–75). A similar observation is also made by Vesa Oittinen (2009, pp. 59–61 and 75f.). Instead of setting the logic of biological systematization at a remove from that of physics and working out the way in which Kant discusses them philosophically, however, Oittinen is intent on her efforts to defend Linnaeus’ empirical work against dubious accusations of a traditional Aristotelianism, and she therefore does not demonstrate much of a feel for Kant’s own approaches.

an underlying natural order of the living.<sup>117</sup> In his own briefer texts, Kant first, under the influence of Buffon, distinguishes natural history from natural description in the sense of Linnaeus<sup>118</sup> and grounds the biological-conceptual divisions on the reproductive capability of living beings, and thereby on their genesis in natural history.<sup>119</sup> By thus relating descriptive classification back to the natural history of genera and species, Kant carries out a fundamental conceptual shift. That is, concepts like genus and species have, since the time of Aristotle, demonstrated a twofold significance, one which is both logical as well as biological, since they described both biological genera and conceptual classification, ultimately in order to view both as being in agreement in terms of assuming a natural order.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, Kant's perspective on natural history, like Buffon and unlike Linnaeus, begins with the historical genesis of individual living forms.<sup>121</sup> From that beginning, however, Kant by no means concludes, as does Buffon, that Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* carries out a merely artificial and arbitrary division that has no equivalent in biological reality. Rather, on the one hand, he considers natural history and natural description to be heuristic maxims that are by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, he shifts the

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**117** Cf. the systematic observations in the survey account by Walter Baron (1968, in particular pp. 16–20).

**118** Cf. Kant's "Of the different races of human beings," *AHE*, 2:427–443, here 434, as well as his "On the use of teleological principles in philosophy," in particular *AHE*, 8:161 and 164.

**119** In making this claim, I am referring, alongside the already cited "Of the different races of human beings" (1775) and "On the use of teleological principles in philosophy" (1788), to "Determination of the concept of a human race" (1785), *AHE*, 8:89–106. For clarification of the so-called "race essays," cf. Adickes (1924, Vol. 2, pp. 406–425), Heimsoeth (1970, pp. 76–81), Sloan (1979, pp. 127–134), and Larson (1994, pp. 85–91), in which context Kant's essays in particular, but occasionally also the authors' clarifications, prove to be highly problematic in a political and ethical sense. On Buffon's critique of a rationalistic-conceptual classification and its promised justification of classification by an investigation into the biological reproduction of living forms, cf. Sloan (1976, pp. 358–361 and 369–371). On Kant's reading of Buffon, cf. once again Sloan (1979, pp. 125–129 and 137–145) as well as Mark Fisher (2007), and for an initial overview also Jean Ferrari (1992, in particular pp. 158–161).

**120** Admittedly, the connection between these two aspects already proves to be problematic in Aristotle, following the argument by D. M. Balme (1962, in particular pp. 97 f.).

**121** I am following here the persuasive expositions by Sloan (1987, in particular pp. 102–105 with reference to Aristotle and pp. 118–126 on Buffon's concept of species). In this piece, Sloan supplements his previous explanation of Buffon's historical background (cf. Sloan 1976, pp. 361–369) with a discussion of Buffon's relation to the concepts of truth held by Locke and Leibniz; on that point, cf. also Sloan (1979, pp. 112–120).

**122** Naturally, the biologists who referred to Kant saw this situation completely differently. Thus, Blumenbach in particular made no little use of Kant in his references, as Kant in turn did with Blumenbach. It thus seems to be quite questionable to interpret Kant's famous charac-

conceptual order of genera into the dimension of natural history to which that order owes its emergence, without thereby – as in the case of an appeal to an allegedly natural order – conferring on that conceptual order a justification in reality or – as if referring to a natural history deprived of the concept – withholding that justification from it in principle.<sup>123</sup>

In this discussion, what is of chief significance for understanding the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is the fact that Kant did not merely have at his disposal a fundamental understanding of the difficulties of biological systematization, but also that, in his discussion of natural description and natural history, he emphasizes the close connection to the determinacy of individual and historical living forms. The presupposition of conceptual classification was constantly the given diversity of living forms, and this diversity simultaneously formed the standard for practical determination and for every feasible nomenclature.<sup>124</sup> Kant attempted to do justice to this methodological peculiarity of the emerging biology philosophically by introducing the reflective activity of judgment. This activity does not merely grant the classifications of biology a place within the philosophical system. It also accounts for the peculiarity of classification, at least to the extent that the progress of the reflective judgment from “particular perceptions” and their intriguing relation to conceptual specification of the particular encompasses the task of doing justice to an intuitable determination of living forms, a determination that cannot per se be derived from funda-

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terization of his critical writings in a vocabulary borrowed from biology (cf. *CPR*, B 167) as a biological justification of philosophical argumentation, a view towards which Sloan seems to incline in his otherwise illuminating explanation of these passages; cf. Sloan (2002) With a critical reference to Larson and Lenoir, Robert J. Richards highlighted the misunderstandings that arose in the realistic or heuristic view of Blumenbach’s concept of the “formative drive”; cf. Richards (2010, pp. 23–32). Sloan also ultimately advocated a similar view; cf. Sloan (2006, in particular pp. 629 and 643f.). The interpretation of Kant’s role in the emerging biology of the 18th and 19th centuries and his attitude towards natural history or natural description seems to depend in a not inessential respect on whether we consult the lesser texts often written on the subject of natural history or take as our standard the three *Critiques*, which are methodologically more rigorous.

**123** Viewed historically, Kant contributes to the further proliferation of a natural-historical perspective in the emerging biology and thereby proves himself, according to the assessment by Larson, to be both representative of and groundbreaking for its development in the 18th century and beyond; cf. Larson (1994, pp. 96–98 and 183–189), as well as Timothy Lenoir (1980), who emphasizes Kant’s significant influence on biology in the 19th century by way of Blumenbach, his students, and beyond.

**124** On the definition of biological nomenclature by Linnaeus, cf. Larson (1971, pp. 122–142). At the time of Kant, the development of nomenclature was a pressing task both for the emerging biology and for chemistry after Lavoisier; cf. Elisabeth Ströker (1982, pp. 272–276).

mental laws and which is not given in any natural order. The problem of assigning each individual living form an appropriate place within a system of nature, a system that, first and foremost, simultaneously determines and specifies those forms both conceptually and empirically, can be seen here in its full urgency.

## The Empirical Transformation of the Transcendental

Consequently, even the background in the history of science attests to the fact that the forms of the systematization of experience that are dealt with in Kant's *Critiques* must be distinguished. The production of a system of experience according to empirical laws that is the task of the reflective judgment in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* does, to be sure, bear a certain relation to the hypothetical use of reason as depicted in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is, however, necessary to assign the appropriate place to this new aspect of reflective activity by relating the formation of the system of empirical laws back to the task of finding a universal for the "particular perceptions," a universal under which the individual object of perception can be subsumed. Unlike the standardization of motion in physics by derivation from Newton's theory of gravitation, which Kant had in mind in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as an ideal, natural description and natural history, which form the backdrop for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, take as their standard the determinacy of concrete living forms.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the reflective judgment and reason do indeed work at the production of a system of empirical experience. However, while reason is based on the conceptual cognition of the understanding and attempts to categorize it into a "rational coherence of explanations" in order to derive the particular, as conceptually specified, from the universal, judgment begins with the particular given in intuition in order to relate it to the order of the conceptual and to arrive at a heuristic judgment (*MF*, 4:534). Thus, the characteristic task of the reflective judgment, that of finding for "particular experience" as such a law that is both particular, but precisely as such also universal, cannot be reduced to the production of the systematic coherence of empirical laws that is likewise incumbent upon it.

The striking similarities between the hypothetical use of reason and the reflective activity of judgment can therefore be viewed in different lights. This

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<sup>125</sup> Interpretations that do not differentiate the activity of the reflective judgment and the hypothetical use of reason or their points of reference in philosophy of science, and which thereby begin with the model of standardization in physics, thus also misjudge the differing relations to individual and particular objects and so frequently run into additional difficulties; cf., e.g., Robert E. Butts (1990, in particular pp. 6–9).

holds true, as in other cases, for the insight that the envisioned system of experience on the foundation of given experiences can only be extrapolated, and therefore can only count as a “projected unity, which one must regard not as given in itself, but only as a problem” (CPR, A 647/B 675).<sup>126</sup> The reason is that this “projected unity” by no means has the same relation to the objects of experience for reason and for judgment. In the case of reason, it already rests on the given cognitions of the understanding, which it merely attempts to order systematically.<sup>127</sup> The reflective judgment, in contrast, begins with the “particular experiences” in order to identify the particular empirical laws that are not given for them from the outset, but which are nevertheless simultaneously supposed to qualify the objects of that experience as concrete objects. As a result, the relation between the individual empirical objects and the particular laws that are presupposed in them proves to be complex. Namely, the reflective judgment is neither limited, like reason, to the ordering of the cognitions of the understanding without determining its objects under the assumption of a specific form of experience; nor does it, like the determining judgment, presuppose *a priori* laws that it could prescribe to its objects constitutively. Rather, it moves, as it were, back and forth between the presumed, but not yet determined nexus of particular laws by means of which an empirical object is qualified as such and the empirical objects that are the only way in which such laws can be demonstrated and proven at all. The reflective judgment must simultaneously, in a reciprocal relationship, qualify the empirical objects and determine their particular laws without it being able to attain a firm hold on either of these two sides of empirical cognition.<sup>128</sup>

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**126** Cf. also CPR, A 663/B 691.

**127** Even Heimsoeth (1969, pp. 557f.) suggests that “the notion of the system” has a “completely different significance” with respect to “particular laws” or “in the context of the Dialectic,” where he, in his commentary on the “Transcendental Dialectic,” is referring to the former expression to a passage contained in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but not in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. He therefore sees the difference solely in the fact that reason “projects” the system of experience, while the reflective judgment “reads” it from things as part of its natural description. With respect to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, however, the reflective activity proves to be quite a bit more complex.

**128** In contrast, Friedman (1992a, in particular pp. 174–180), in light of the texts from the first to the third *Critique*, has proposed seeing in Newton’s standardization of physics the paradigm for a justification of empirical laws that understands them as instantiations and specifications of *a priori* laws, which derives them in this sense and furnishes them with necessity, without annulling their empirical character entirely. Cf. also Friedman (1992c, pp. 83–90), as well as, for a critical view on the subject, Allison (1994). Friedman’s interesting model of a reassurance of empirical experience in conditions that are to be specified in a manner that is both *a priori* and empirical would be a subject of more detailed discussion here, but for the fact that it

This characteristic of the activity of the reflective judgment opens up a peculiar “circle”: it is only capable of recognizing empirical laws in the context of the objects of empirical experience, but nevertheless it can only qualify these objects as concrete objects of empirical knowledge under the assumption of that lawful context. The task of the power of judgment, that of seeking “for particular experiences the general rules in accordance with which we have to arrange them in order to bring out that systematic connection which is necessary for an interconnected experience,” is therefore “circular,” and indeed even more fundamentally since we “have to assume *a priori*” this “systematic connection” (*FI*, 20:204).<sup>129</sup> Such a “circle,” however, does not represent any fallacy of logical deduction, but rather characterizes the necessary and essential “empiricism” of judgment: instead of *grounding* the most universal *explanations* of the understanding by demonstrating *a priori* laws as conditions of cognition and its objects in general, Kant *describes* a reciprocal relation, inherent in the *acts of judgment* taken by the reflective judgment, between the assumptions and the objects of cognition, a relation that accounts for cognition, along with its specific conditions, as essentially empirical and hands that cognition over to its practical progress.<sup>130</sup>

Kant’s conception of the reflective judgment thus includes a theory of empirical cognition, which, under the assumption of heuristic principles and empirical laws, qualifies, even if it does not determine, its objects in order simultaneously to test these same assumptions empirically in the context of these objects and, if

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does not accentuate the specific characteristic of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that, in my opinion, is decisive for the connection to Cassirer. With a view to Cassirer and the third *Critique*, therefore, I will focus on a different aspect.

**129** Cited once again for context: “This lawfulness, in itself (in accordance with all concepts of the understanding) contingent, which the power of judgment presumes of nature and presupposes in it (only for its own advantage), is a formal purposiveness of nature, which we simply assume in it, but through which neither a theoretical cognition of nature nor a practical principle of freedom is grounded, although a principle for the judging and investigation of nature is given, in order to seek for particular experiences the general rules in accordance with which we have to arrange them in order to bring out that systematic connection which is necessary for an interconnected experience and which we have to assume *a priori*” (*FI*, 20:204).

**130** Against the backdrop of science studies, which investigates research practices, Joan Steigerwald has presented such a “pragmatic” interpretation of the activity of the reflective judgment as well as of the relationship between principles and objects of empirical experience; cf. Steigerwald (2002, in particular pp. 79–101). Kant’s conception of the reflective judgment thus does not merely concede to the experiment the role that it is actually owed; it appears to be a reflection on the concrete experimental practice of Wolff and Blumenbach and on the heuristic-instrumental function of their conceptualizations. This invigorating approach is unfortunately spoiled by the fact that Steigerwald’s statements venture all too far and nevertheless remain overly simplistic, and moreover that her interpretation of Kant occasionally seems imprecise.



necessary, to subject them to revision. Empirical cognition thus opens up and operates within a context in which its necessary, albeit provisional assumptions and the determinacy of the empirical objects are supposed to be increasingly interwoven with one another by virtue of those assumptions being put to the test or revised empirically. A “subjectively necessary transcendental *presupposition*” thus describes a condition that opens cognition up towards its own empirical progress (*FI*, 20:209). We are dealing with a new, genuinely empirical situation for cognition and a different relation to its specific objects, because this cognition is not only of an empirical origin with respect to its content, but rather also, with its own transcendental, but nevertheless revisable conditions, has to put its concrete form to the test in the context of specific objects and their empirical order.

This theory of empirical cognition stands in opposition to an idealist reading of Kant that locates the third *Critique* from the outset under the auspices of its effect in German Idealism.<sup>131</sup> That is, the new situation of cognition cannot be reduced to the most universal *a priori* conditions of experience and its objects as such, but rather includes the diverse forms of empirical cognition along with their specific conditions. This approach, as shown, is initially the result of Kant’s discussion of biological knowledge, but it now gives rise to the question of whether or not it is outlining a perspective on empirical cognition as such that must also incorporate physics in particular. In retrospect, namely, this situation forces the following choice: either knowledge in physics, following a widespread interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, enjoys the exclusive privilege, unlike biology and other forms of empirical cognition, of determining its objects directly by means of the determining judgment and the schematization of the pure concepts of the understanding, or it too – as suggested by the outlined interpretation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – is involved with one part of the “manifold of forms in nature” and their “particular laws,” instead of being able to ground itself immediately in “universal transcendental concepts of nature” and their universal laws, which “pertain only to the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses) in general” (*CPJ*, 5:179f.). We are thus dealing with the question of to what extent the claims concerning the validity of knowledge in biology and in physics can be distinguished from one another essentially, as a direct comparison of the two *Critiques* seems to indicate, or whether both belong to em-

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**131** For such a reading, and thereby an idealist history of the development from the first to the third *Critique*, cf. Eckart Förster (2012, especially pp. 138ff.).

pirical cognition, which admittedly takes very different forms in each of them, but which can only ever be of a heuristic-reflective certainty.

The process of drawing out the consequences from Kant's treatment of biology for our understanding of physics as well has the advantage of avoiding a naïve reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that was initially pursued at the beginning of the present chapter. Namely, it was suggested there that the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience should also be understood immediately as conditions of knowledge in physics. However, discussions in recent years have shown, among other things, that the category of causality is still quite far removed from any causal law in physics, and by no means justifies such a law without further efforts.<sup>132</sup> Such a discovery, in agreement with the reading of the underlying problem of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that is pursued here, leads to the conclusion that the *a priori* conditions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* must be understood in so general a manner that they do not ground any individual form of empirical cognition alongside its specific, transcendental, but not *a priori* conditions, but rather, in addition to physics and biology, encompass all forms equally. The explanations of physics would then no longer be essentially distinguished in terms of their justification from the heuristic-reflective judgments of biology. Rather, both would share the same measure of certainty that belongs to empirical cognition and would position their "teleological" and "physical-mechanical [modes] of explanation" as empirical-heuristic maxims of equal importance (*AHE*, 8:179).

Entirely in keeping with this sense, Kant connects physics with "mechanism" in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and comprehends the latter, like the "teleology" of biology, as a heuristic principle.<sup>133</sup> Accordingly, physics would then likewise be in need of the services of the reflective judgment and would have

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**132** Naturally, Kant's statements on *CPR*, A 189–211/B 232–256 concerning the "principles of the pure understanding," and in particular concerning the "Second Analogy" or the "[p]rinciple of temporal sequence according to the law of causality," are central for this discussion. For useful insights into this extensive discussion touching on many of the questions discussed in this section, cf. Buchdahl (1965), Friedman (1992c), and Allison (1994).

**133** Bauer-Drevermann (1996, p. 502) too has already concluded that "mechanism cannot simply constitute the concretization of the transcendental principle of causality, but rather one concrete specialization of it. As such, however, it is dependent on empirical circumstances and can be numbered among the laws that govern the representation of the particular and that, according to the findings of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, are accidental." Josef Simon also deals with this problem with a view to the relationship of the concept of science as such to the example of a concrete individual science; cf. Simon (1971, in particular pp. 278–286 and 294–297). He, however, is concerned primarily with the dependence of the concept of science on a concrete historical paradigm at the level of theory-formation.

to forego any purely objective determination of its objects in the sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It would rather, like any empirical cognition, be relegated to adapting itself to its concrete objects, to the point of identifying its own specific conditions and its own particular laws. Under the premise of mechanism, it would also attempt to explain all complex interconnections as an effect resulting from elementary causes, while biological knowledge, in the sense of teleology, would refer to interconnections whose parts reciprocally condition one another and which appear to be organized under the presupposition of a goal or a function.<sup>134</sup>

There is reason to believe the thesis that it was, among others, these questions that were still motivating Kant even after the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, until his thought ultimately trails off into the numerous outlines and scraps of the so-called *Opus postumum*. However, it can hardly be decided on the basis of these texts what sort of development actually took place in Kant's argumentation, even if several detailed interpretations seem to attest to the fact that Kant ultimately regarded physics, like biology, as one specific form of empirical knowledge that is ultimately reliant on the reflective judgment and therefore, unlike in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, can henceforth claim only a limited validity. With a view to the genesis of Cassirer's "Philosophy of the Symbolic," however, this question can remain open. The reason is that, on the one hand, the *Opus postumum* does not play a role in Cassirer's understanding of Kant either around 1917 or later.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, what is at

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**134** This is also the view of Löw (1980, pp. 180–182 and 204–214). In light of the *Opus postumum*, however, he develops from this view a more wide-reaching and questionable thesis. Namely, he does not merely follow Kant's path from the dominance of the determining judgment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, through the introduction of the reflective judgment in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where the teleological judgment is still subordinated to the judgment of cognition, up to the dominance of the reflective judgment, where mechanism and teleology are equal principles for judging by means of the power of judgment. Beyond that, he sees the culmination of this train of thought in the *Opus postumum* and its "Aristotelian turn," which binds the transcendental deduction to the body of the subject, its existence and its activities within a world of purposes; cf. Löw (1980, pp. 138, 214–216, and especially 227–229). The *Opus postumum*, which is anything but one single work, as McLaughlin (1990) argues in a critique of Löw, can hardly substantiate such a far-reaching thesis.

**135** To my knowledge, Cassirer only cites the initial and incomplete publication of what would later be called the *Opus postumum* in the *Altpreußischen Monatsschrift* from 1882–1884 by Rudolf Reicke in Cassirer (1981, pp. 407 ff., particularly on pp. 408 f., note 56.); cf. that passage also for the precise bibliographical information. Cassirer evaluates this alleged work as a document from the aging Kant's final days of fading mental acuity, one that is hardly philosophically reliable. A similar assessment can be found in Cassirer's review of Albert Görland's work *Aristotle and Kant [Aristoteles und Kant]* from 1911; cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 468–483, here p. 479. A complete edi-

issue here are the shifts in Kant's system that are sketched out in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its "First Introduction."<sup>136</sup> Cassirer, because of his occupation with the aesthetics of the 18th century and his work on Kant's *Werke*, had certainly been dealing with these texts once again before outlining his new project of a "Philosophy of the Symbolic" in 1917. And furthermore, according to my thesis, he extracted from them proposals for how he could rework his own systematic approaches in such a way as to allow space for questions of aesthetics alongside the "problem of knowledge" that had hitherto been his focus.

In the first chapter, it was demonstrated, with the help of the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," how Cassirer generalizes his theory of the scientific concept into the conception of the symbolic and how he thereby shows the relation between these most universal conditions of cultural meaning and the diversity of historical-empirical specifications of symbolization to be a central challenge for the whole project. In order to broaden his own philosophy beyond knowledge and to deal with both the unity as well as the diversity of cultural meaning under the banner of the symbolic, however, Cassirer found helpful conceptual material in Kant's reflections on the universal and particular, *a priori* and empirical conditions of cognition from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its "First Introduction." In this way, his rereading of Kant attained a central significance for Cassirer's conception of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," a point which will be substantiated in more detail in the last section of the present chapter. Before that, however, we will pursue Kant's argumentation further, at least to the point of a preliminary conclusion, by explaining in brief his answer to the challenge from the philosophy of science that has been discussed. Thereby, we will also address the transition to the topic that confirmed Cassirer, like many other interpreters, in his view that, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, we have Kant's aesthetics.

## Kant's Aesthetic Answer to the Question of the Universal for the Particular

The preceding discussion of the transformation of the transcendental in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* left the question with which it began essentially

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tion of the *Opus postumum* was first produced in 1936 and 1938 in the context of the so-called Academy edition.

<sup>136</sup> For a discussion of this connection with the project of the *Opus postumum*, cf. Friedman (1992b, pp. 242–264), who, however, estimates the innovation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as being rather minimal.

unanswered: why should it be possible at all to find a particular law, but as such one which is nevertheless universal and conceptual, for the particular that is given to us in intuition? The “subjectively necessary transcendental *presupposition*”<sup>137</sup> of the reflective judgment thus, like the formulation of its “principle,” represents, as before, an open problem: “The principle of reflection on given objects of nature is that for all things in nature empirically determinate concepts can be found, which is to say the same as that in all of its products one can always presuppose a form that is possible for general laws cognizable by us” (*FI*, 20:211f.). The discussions up to this point have shown only that this principle is not valid objectively, because it does not, like *a priori* conditions, determine objects as such, but rather merely opens up a heuristic approach to the “natural forms.” The reflective judgment cannot itself guarantee the assumptions that are indispensable to it, and so it remains at the discretion of nature whether to acquiesce to the sought-after classifications into genera and species or to withstand the efforts of the reflective judgment.<sup>138</sup> Philosophical justifications meet their limit here, and the reference to a practical proof seems to offer itself up as the only escape: in the progress of research, the assumption of the reflective judgment, that it is able to grasp nature as a system, will either prove to be successful and guarantee an enduring connection or prove to be a vain hope and lead to a fundamental failure of the struggle towards empirical knowledge.

Kant the philosopher, however, is not satisfied with this situation, but rather shifts his focus to the modalities of a possible answer. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he had still been attempting to understand the validity of the regulative principles of reason according to the model of the “Transcendental Analytic.” Consequently, they are no more capable than is the principle of the reflective judgment of a deduction that would have to show, as in the case of the categories of the understanding, that these principles determine objects constitutively as such. Nevertheless, Kant characterized the regulative principles as “objective but in an indeterminate way (*principium vagum*),” in which context his often im-

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**137** *FI*, 20:209.

**138** In one of Kant’s notes, thus, it seems to be nature and not the faculty that “makes classification possible”: “only the (reflecting) power of judgment, which also seeks concepts for empirical representations, as such, must further assume for this purpose that nature in its boundless multiplicity has hit upon a division of itself into genera and species that makes it possible for our power of judgment to find consensus in the comparison of natural forms and to arrive at empirical concepts, and their interconnection with each other, through ascent to more general but still empirical concepts; i.e., the power of judgment presupposes a system of nature which is also in accordance with empirical laws and does so *a priori*, consequently by means of a transcendental principle” (*FI*, 20:212, n.).

precise and partially contradictory statements can hardly point out the precise way in which this indeterminate type of objectivity should be understood (CPR, A 680/B 708).<sup>139</sup> In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and the “First Introduction,” in contrast, Kant rejects any answer that takes as its standard any justification from the *a priori* conditions of cognition that remains so indeterminate. In this sense, Kant now understands the question of why the diversity of “natural forms,” despite all possible heterogeneity, should be capable of being represented as a system of nature as unanswerable in theoretical terms. As such, he sets out towards an answer that no longer attempts to derive the principle of the power of judgment from the necessary conditions of objectivity as such, but which is rather based on our factual and illustrative experience that concept and intuition nevertheless seem compatible in principle.<sup>140</sup> In so doing, Kant does not so much invoke the experience that the conditions of the reflective judgment have oftentimes proven themselves practically in the process of cognition. Rather, he gives an aesthetic answer insofar as, in aesthetic experience, he views the assumption of the reflective judgment that a concept can be found for the particular in perception, although certainly not proved in an objective manner, as being affirmed subjectively in sensation.<sup>141</sup>

Once again, it is the “First Introduction” in which Kant develops this notion. In the section “On the technique of the power of judgment as the ground of the idea of a technique of nature,” he discusses once again the “subjective principle of the division and specification of nature” and outlines this necessary assump-

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**139** Cf. primarily CPR, A 650–657/B 678–685, A 663–670/B 697–698, and A 679–682/B 707–710, as well as the quite lenient Heimsoeth (1969, pp. 593f.).

**140** Because Guyer, in his comparison of the reflective judgment and the hypothetical use of reason, focuses on the systematicity of empirical concepts and not their relation to the concrete objects of intuition, he has in view the innovative question of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, while the aesthetic answer escapes his gaze. He thus arrives at the skeptical conclusion that Kant's statements came “pretty close to the surrender of such a metaphysical model of our relation to reality” (Guyer 1990, p. 42).

**141** Kant's aesthetic answer to the epistemological problem of the existence of a universal for the particular that is given in intuition also eludes Marc-Wogau (1938, pp. 36–40), because, even though he does distinguish between “logical” and “aesthetic purposiveness,” he nevertheless only sets them beside one another, instead of including the idea of an aesthetic, “sensible condition” of the logical use of the power of judgment, which I will discuss in more detail later. In my opinion, it is noteworthy that Marc-Wogau (1938, pp. 23–28) analyzes the activity of the reflective judgment in parallel to the hypothetical use of reason and therefore does not at all properly emphasize the problem of the existence of a universal for the particular of intuition. But it is precisely this problem that distinguishes the reflective judgment and inspires the transformation of the transcendental, which Marc-Wogau does not realize, as demonstrated, e.g., by his analysis of the concept of the beautiful; cf. Marc-Wogau (1938, pp. 124–135).

tion of the power of judgment yet again with new concepts (*FI*, 20:219). Kant now characterizes a representation of nature corresponding to the principle of the reflective judgment with the help of the concepts of technique and art, which he uses synonymously: an object, accordingly, is regarded under the auspices of art or technique when it only appears as possible to the extent that it was produced by relation to an imagined purpose.<sup>142</sup> As such, the “technique of nature” describes the idea that nature itself has created the “natural forms” under the presupposition of determinate purposes.<sup>143</sup> Kant begins with the fact that a nature that is produced in such a manner would also be ordered conceptually, and therefore that the reflective judgment could find a universal for every particular and the particular laws could be unified into a system. The reason is that the natural forms would be ordered by reference to “purposes,” as it were, as if by an “understanding (even if not ours),” and should therefore also turn out to be “purposive” for our faculties of cognition (*CPJ*, 5:180).<sup>144</sup> They are purposive for the reflective judgment because they can be considered and judged as if nature has produced them in accordance with purposes and as if they were thereby specified as a system.<sup>145</sup> This “representation of nature as art”<sup>146</sup> should thus be understood as the objective counterpart to the principle of the reflective judg-

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**142** “The concept which originally arises from the power of judgment and is proper to it is thus that of nature as *art*, in other words that of the *technique* of nature with regard to its particular laws, which concept does not ground any theory ... but only gives a principle for progress in accordance with laws of experience, whereby the investigation of nature becomes possible” (*FI*, 20:204f.). On the conceptual relation between technique and art, cf. also *FI*, 20:219f., as well as, for philosophical clarification of Kant’s expression “technique of nature,” Ulrike Santozki (2005, in particular pp. 94–99).

**143** Cf. *FI*, 20:219f., and for clarification Mertens (1975, pp. 115–118), who, however, also persists here with the questionably realistic tendency of her interpretation when she ultimately prescribes for the “technique of nature” a “natural technique” in the sense of a “nature in terms of its structure of existing in itself”; cf. Mertens (1975, pp. 123f.).

**144** The passage cited here, together with the accompanying paragraphs 76 and 77 in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, plays a central role in the discussion concerning what we might call the implicit Hegelianism of the late Kant. The assumption of a law-giving “understanding,” which Kant clearly understands in subsequent lines once again as a “principle” and which serves “for reflecting, not for determining,” would consequently not be an entryway for Hegel’s appropriative reading, but rather for Kant’s own development towards speculative philosophy; cf. Burkhard Tuschling (1992), as well as the critique thereof by Allison (2000). For the sake of clarity, let me state here that this view is compatible neither with the interpretation of the activity of the reflective judgment and its conditions that has been presented nor with the subsequent interpretation of the mission of Kant’s analytic of the beautiful.

**145** Cf. *FI*, 20:214.

**146** *FI*, 20:205.

ment, since it is ultimately this representation that “proceeds” “*technically*” and “*artistically*” and thereby represents nature as produced by “technique” or “art.”<sup>147</sup>

The decisive question that translates this epistemological problem into an aesthetic one in the sense used by Kant is now the following: “How can the technique of nature in its products *be perceived?*” (*FI*, 20:219). The term “perceived,” which is emphasized in the original, cannot, as Kant hastens to explain, refer solely to an objective determination, because the purposiveness of nature is characteristic of its relationship to a subjective faculty. The perception of the purposiveness of an object must therefore ultimately make it possible for this relationship to be experienced. As such, it begins with an empirical “natural form,” which is not, however, merely determined as an object of perception, but rather also represents the occasion for “mere reflection on a perception” (*FI*, 20:220). Consequently, this reflection takes place *in the context of* this object to the extent that it is the perception of that object with which the reflection begins. It distinguishes itself as “mere reflection,” however, from the efforts of the reflective judgment to determine the object objectively by means of particular empirical laws. Instead, it turns back to the faculties of cognition, whose activity is occasioned by perception, and in that context focuses in particular on the interaction between imagination and understanding, an interaction which has to proceed without obstruction in order for the reflective judgment to find a universal con-

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147 “The reflecting power of judgment thus proceeds with given appearances, in order to bring them under empirical concepts of determinate natural things, not schematically, but *technically*, not as it were merely mechanically, like an instrument, but *artistically*, in accordance with the general but at the same time indeterminate principle of a purposive arrangement of nature in a system, as it were for the benefit of our power of judgment, in the suitability of its particular laws (about which understanding has nothing to say) for the possibility of experience as a system, without which presupposition we could not hope to find our way in a labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible empirical particular laws” (*FI*, 20:213 f.).

“However, we shall in the future also use the expression ‘technique’ where objects of nature are sometimes merely judged as if their possibility were grounded in art, in which cases the judgments are neither theoretical nor practical (in the sense just adduced), since they do not determine anything about the constitution of the object nor the way in which to produce it; rather through them nature itself is judged, but merely in accordance with the analogy with an art, and indeed in subjective relation to our cognitive faculty, not in objective relation to the objects. Now here we will not indeed call the judgments themselves technical, but rather the power of judgment, on whose laws they are grounded, and in accordance with it we will also call nature technical” (*FI*, 20:200 f.).

“Thus the *power of judgment* is properly technical; nature is represented technically only insofar as it conforms to that procedure of the power of judgment and makes it necessary” (*FI*, 20:220).



cept for the particular given in intuition. The purposiveness of the object is thus evident in the fact that intuitable and conceptual syntheses are commensurate with one another when there is interaction between the “*apprehension ... of the manifold of intuition*” and the “*comprehension, i.e., the synthetic unity of the consciousness of this manifold in the concept of an object*” (*FI*, 20:220). Only then can the activity of the power of judgment be successful and bring about the “*presentation ... of the object corresponding to this concept in intuition*” (*FI*, 20:220).

The “inner perception of a purposiveness of representations” thus rests on the lived experience that the condition that the reflective judgment has to presuppose in its activity for any object is proven true in the context of this individual object (*FI*, 20:220).<sup>148</sup> Such a confirmation of the assumption of the power of judgment by way of example, however, should by no means be confused with a simple observation of the actual state of the faculty of cognition.<sup>149</sup> Rather, it rests on putting the actual activity of the faculties of cognition in relation to and comparing it with the condition that has to be guaranteed for the reflective activity of the power of judgment. That “inner perception” must therefore be accompanied by the fact that “in a merely reflective judgment imagination and understanding are considered in the relation to each other in which they must stand in the power of judgment in general, as compared with the relation in which they actually stand in the case of a given perception” (*FI*, 20:220). Such a “reflective judgment” thus involves interaction between imagination and understanding in two ways: as a factual condition of these faculties of cognition and as a necessary condition for the successful activity of the reflective judgment. Purposiveness will then be able to be experienced *in the context of* an object when the “reflected perception” of this sort reveals an unobstructed interaction between imagination and understanding, in such a way as to guarantee that the power of judgment is capable of finding a universal concept for the particular given in intuition (*CPJ*, 5:191). This situation provides the answer to Kant’s question of how the purposiveness or “the technique of nature” can *be perceived* in the context of “its products”: we perceive purposiveness in the context of an object when its perception is the occasion for a reflection in which a judgment identifies the interaction between imagination and understanding, as that inter-

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**148** Shortly before, Kant explains: “In our power of judgment we perceive purposiveness insofar as it merely reflects upon a given object, whether in order to bring the empirical intuition of that object under some concept (it is indeterminate which), or in order to bring the laws which the concept of experience itself contains under common principles” (*FI*, 20:220).

**149** On what follows, with a view to the normative and intersubjective dimension of a judgment of taste, cf. also Robert Pippin (1996, in particular pp. 557–566).

action actually occurs, with that which the reflective judgment has to presuppose for any empirical object.<sup>150</sup>

In an “*aesthetic reflection of judgment*,” the object thus turns out in principle to be suitable for the understanding and its concepts (*FI*, 20:221). As a “reflection of judgment,” however, it is an expression of the interaction among the faculties of cognition, and it does not, like the judgment of cognition, determine the perceived object. If we encounter an object as beautiful in lived experience, then what we are concerned with is not primarily this object, but rather the “animation of both faculties (the imagination and the understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but yet, through the stimulus of the given representation, in unison, namely that which belongs to a cognition in general” (*CPJ*, 5:219).<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the perception in which aesthetic experience has its origin, as it were, matches up with the concept in that it presents “purposive shapes ... i.e., the form in the representation of which imagination and understanding agree mutually and of themselves for the possibility of a concept” (*FI*, 20:232).<sup>152</sup> The experience thus shifts into a specifically aesthetic mode, in which the faculties of cognition, primarily the understanding and imagination, enter into a productive interaction that is presupposed in every objective cognition. This interaction, however, is not bound by the concept of the object in aesthetic experience or oriented towards its objective determination. What it comes down to is solely the fact that we can experience in the beautiful the way in which the faculties of cognition “agree mutually and of themselves for the *possibility* of a concept,” without the object being brought to the concept as in the case of cognition: “The satisfaction in the beautiful must depend upon reflection on an object that leads to some sort of concept (it is indeterminate which)” (*CPJ*, 5:207).<sup>153</sup> In this sense, the interaction is both free and simultaneously bound up with the sensation of the

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**150** “If, then, the form of a given object in empirical intuition is so constituted that the apprehension of its manifold in the imagination agrees with the presentation of a concept of the understanding (though which concept be undetermined), then in the mere reflection understanding and imagination mutually agree for the advancement of their business, and the object will be perceived as purposive merely for the power of judgment, hence the purposiveness itself will be considered as merely subjective; for which, further, no determinate concept of the object at all is required nor is one thereby generated, and the judgment itself is not a cognitive judgment” (*FI*, 20:220f.).

**151** Only because the aesthetic judgment is thus related to the conditions of cognition as such can it, even if not objectively, because it is not related to any object, nevertheless be universal in a subjective sense, since these conditions of cognition are shared first and foremost by all subjects who are capable of cognition; cf. *CPJ*, 5:203–5:213, as well as Mertens (1975, pp. 179–181).

**152** Cf. also *FI*, 20:212, 20:229, and 20:233.

**153** On the relation of the beautiful to purposiveness, cf. also *CPJ*, 5:186ff. and 5:192ff.

animation and liveliness of the faculties. Therefore, it does not merely give evidence of the presuppositions of the reflective judgment and of empirical cognition by way of example, but rather also affirms the assumption of the purposiveness of objects for our faculties of cognition by the liveliness of aesthetic experience.<sup>154</sup> It is this fact, that the subjectively, but not objectively necessary condition of the activity of the reflective judgment is proven to be true in the context of the beautiful object, that does not merely give rise to the “admiration” of which “hardly anyone other than a transcendental philosopher would be capable,” but rather also incites in everyone the sensation of pleasure that underlies the aesthetic judgment (*FI*, 20:216).<sup>155</sup>

Thus, the focus of this analysis of aesthetic experience is not a justification, but rather the affirmation of the assumption of the reflective judgment that it is able to find a universal for the particular.<sup>156</sup> As a result, this subjectively necessary assumption should also be understood as the “subjective, merely sensitive condition of the objective use of the power of judgment” (*FI*, 20:223 f.).<sup>157</sup> Unlike in the aesthetics of Baumgarten or Hegel, thus, the beginning of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is not rooted in questions concerning the fine arts or a characteristic of artistic experience, which is why it is also misleading to identify it as “Kant’s aesthetics.”<sup>158</sup> The reason is that Kant’s “merely reflective judgment”

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**154** On this subject, cf. also Wolfgang Wieland (1990, in particular pp. 620 f.).

**155** “In just the same way the resolution of the aesthetic judgment of reflection will display the concept of the formal but subjective purposiveness of the object, resting on an *a priori* principle, which is fundamentally identical with the feeling of pleasure, but which cannot be derived from concepts, and to the possibility of which in general the power of representation is related when it affects the mind in reflection on an object” (*FI*, 20:230). Cf. also *CPJ*, 5:188–192.

**156** Mertens (1975, p. 102, n. 10) thus, with a view to the “problem of the beautiful” and the “logic of experience,” speaks with complete justification of a “problematic entanglement” in the “First Introduction.”

**157** Kant explains: “An aesthetic judgment in general can therefore be explicated as that judgment whose predicate can never be cognition (concept of an object) (although it may contain the subjective conditions for a cognition in general)” (*FI*, 20:224). Consequently, according to Kant, “in terms of its principles, the aesthetic judgment belongs to the higher faculty of cognition and indeed to the power of judgment, under whose subjective but nevertheless still universal conditions the representation of the object is subsumed” (*FI*, 20:225). Cf. also the close connection between the principles of aesthetic judgments of reflection and the empirical activity of the reflective judgment in *FI*, 20:232 f.

**158** This should certainly be taken literally, since at the beginning of the “Preface” Kant invokes precisely the reconstructed context of the constitutive concepts of the understanding, the regulative use of reason, and the question of the conditions and principles of the reflective judgment; cf. *CPJ*, 5:167–170. The widespread perception of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as “Kant’s aesthetics” has been scrutinized critically by Wieland (1990, pp. 604–610).

does not refer to an aesthetic object in a variety of respects. As has already been noted, it does not, generally speaking, refer primarily to the object, the intuition of which functions only as the occasion for a “reflected perception.” Consequently, Kant also criticizes Baumgarten, who had introduced the concept of aesthetics in philosophy and linked it closely with the determination of the aesthetic object and its perfection.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, for Kant, what is important is not the aesthetic richness of the sensory object and its concrete attributes, a richness that, as in Baumgarten, would be in tension with the clarity and the few properties of a concept, which is why aesthetic representation has to strive for a balanced, harmonious compromise between these two poles. Rather, the object of the aesthetic judgment turns out to be purposive for the activity of the reflective judgment, and therefore in particular to be suitable for conceptual cognition. Ultimately, as a result of the epistemological background of his reflections, Kant does not view even works of art as suitable occasions for the “aesthetic judgment of reflection.” The reason is that the assumption of the reflective judgment, that the objects of our perception are purposive for our faculties of cognition, cannot receive any confirmation by perceiving works of art: what we know about works of art, namely, is that they were produced by a human being in pursuit of a goal, such that their purposiveness simply seems necessary.<sup>160</sup> The real test of the principle of the reflective judgment, therefore, is not to be found in human products, but rather in “natural forms.” The aesthetic judgment thus begins its reflection with “natural forms” like the “wild flower,” concerning which we can know nothing of any prior purpose.<sup>161</sup> For this reason, however, they can allow us to experience the fact that the unprovable assumption of the reflective judgment proves true at least in the individual case. The “purposiveness” that the reflective

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**159** On the subjective, not objective determination of the aesthetic judgment, cf. *FI*, 20:219–224, and on the subsequent critique of Baumgarten, *FI*, 20:226–232 and *CPJ*, 5:226–229. On the topic of perfection in this context, cf. the German translation of Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (2007, here Vol. 1, pp. 532–545). For an explanation of the multifaceted concept of *perfectio*, cf. the editor's introduction to the same work (Baumgarten 2007, pp. XV–LXXX, here pp. LIII–LXV).

**160** Cf. *FI*, 20:240 and 20:246, as well as *CPJ*, 5:362–383.

**161** “Yet the fact that they [human products whose purpose we do not know, A.S.] are regarded as a work of art is already enough to require one to admit that one relates their shape to some sort of intention and to a determinate purpose. Hence there is also no immediate satisfaction at all in their intuition. A flower, by contrast, e.g., a tulip, is held to be beautiful because a certain purposiveness is encountered in our perception of it which, as we judge it, is not related to any end at all” (*CPJ*, 5:236). On the “flower” as the paradigmatic example, cf. also the following passages: *CPJ*, 5:207, 5:215 f., and 5:229, as well as, on the examples in Kant's theory of the beautiful and sublime in general, Gernot Böhme (1999, pp. 19–29 and 83–107).

judgment and every empirical cognition whatsoever constantly presupposes can thus be “given empirically” only with the help of such “particular forms of nature” (*FI*, 20:243).

Kant’s analysis of the experience of purposiveness in the context of the beautiful object thus represents an answer to the underlying epistemological problem of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, however, there arises all the more the question of why Kant describes the “merely reflective judgment” as aesthetic. The reason lies precisely in the fact that it does not determine any object, but rather refers first and foremost to the subject, such that it does not, in the strict sense, involve any judgment at all.<sup>163</sup> The “purposive form” of a beautiful object excites the activity of the faculties of cognition and the pleasure of their productive interaction, which, as a purely subjective sensation, should not in any way be related to an object.<sup>164</sup> It is this purely reflective reference to the subject and the sensation of his pleasure that, for Kant, justifies calling the “merely reflective judgment” aesthetic.

Nevertheless, what is at stake in aesthetic experience is by no means solely a merely subjective sensation. The reason is that this sensation simultaneously represents a confirmation of the subjectively necessary assumption of the reflective judgment and, as such, a confirmation of the specific condition of genuinely empirical knowledge. It thus nurtures in the experience of the beautiful the hope of an “agreement of nature with our faculty of cognition,” which can by no means be grounded in the *a priori* conditions of knowledge (*CPJ*, 5:185).<sup>165</sup>

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**162** This is also the position of Klaus J. Schmidt (1990, p. 141): “The aesthetic approach thereby advances to become a genuine foundation for the theory of particular experience – of empirical natural science – because without the ‘aesthetic judgment,’ i.e., without its principle of formal purposiveness, the understanding ‘could not find itself therein,’ i.e., in nature. The only thing I would add to this accurate conclusion is the question of to what extent we can speak of a “foundation” here. Hannah Ginsborg (1990, in particular pp. 75 f.) misunderstands this systematic function of the aesthetic judgment when she, in her worthwhile engagement with the reflective judgment of knowledge, believes it to be related to the “principle of the systematicity of nature.”

**163** Cf. also, in contrast to the “Transcendental Aesthetic” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *FI*, 20:220–224 and 20:247 ff., as well as *CPJ*, 5:167–170.

**164** Cf. *CPJ*, 5:176 ff., and for clarification Wieland (1990, pp. 614–618). The quoted definition of pleasure excludes the “sensory judgment” that is applicable to the agreeable and in that context refers to a sensation that is elicited immediately by the object of perception and not by the interaction of the subjective faculties; on that point, cf. also *FI*, 20:222 f., and *CPJ*, 5:204 f.

**165** “A representation which, though singular and without comparison to others, nevertheless is in agreement with the conditions of universality, an agreement that constitutes the business of the understanding in general, brings the faculties of cognition into the well-proportioned disposition that we require for all cognition and hence also regard as valid for everyone (for every

Kant expresses this notion in an even more unguarded and candid way in a reflection from his literary estate: “Beautiful things indicate that the human being is suited for the world and even that his intuition of things matches up with the laws of his intuition” (*LN*, 16:127).<sup>166</sup>

This systematic approach can be detected in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as well as in its “First Introduction,”<sup>167</sup> although Kant, in the published version of the introduction, is more inclined to speak of a “merely subjective” *a priori* with regard to the subjectively necessary assumptions of the reflective judgment, and thereby to allow the empirical side of the conditions of the reflective judgment to fade into the background (*CPJ*, 5:177).<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, the transformation of the concept of the transcendental and the alteration of the relation of the subject to the world remain unmistakable. The reason is that the conditions of the reflective judgment can no longer be grounded *a priori*, but rather are only proved in the context of objects in empirical cognition or sensed in the pleasure of the beautiful. Transcendental reflection, however, which from the time of the *Critique of Pure Reason* had only had an eye for *a priori* conditions, must thereby change its form.<sup>169</sup> It runs into the limits of the approach of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that of “assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition,” because only the most universal and *a priori* conditions of cognition can be validly prescribed to the objects of our cognition (*CPR*, B XVI).<sup>170</sup> For empirical experience and its specific conditions, in contrast, the valid move is that we have to “conform” to the particular objects and concrete nature: “The reflecting power of judgment, therefore, can only give itself such a transcendental principle as a law, and cannot derive it from anywhere else (for

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human being) who is determined to judge by means of understanding and sense in combination” (*CPJ*, 5:219). On this “agreement,” cf. also *CPJ*, 5:190, as well as *FI*, 20:212 and 20:232f. **166** For the reference to this passage, I would like to thank a participant in my seminars at the University of Basel, Dominique Laleg.

**167** The underlying problem of the “First Introduction” that is in question here should, alongside the already cited passages and quotations, primarily be understood in light of section “V. The principle of the formal purposiveness of nature is a transcendental principle of the power of judgment” in *CPJ*, 5:181–186.

**168** Thus, according to *CPJ*, 5:182, “the ground for judging in this way must be sought in the sources of cognition *a priori*” in the context of a “transcendental deduction.”

**169** “Reflection (*reflexio*) does not have to do with objects themselves, in order to acquire concepts directly from them, but is rather the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts. It is the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our various sources of cognition, through which alone their relation among themselves can be correctly determined” (*CPR*, A 260/B 316).

**170** Cf. a similar formulation in the “Transcendental Dialectic,” *CPR*, B 163.

then it would be the determining power of judgment), nor can it prescribe it to nature: for reflection on the laws of nature [conforms to] nature, and nature [does not conform to] the conditions in terms of which we attempt to develop a concept of it that is in this regard entirely contingent” (*CPJ*, 5:180).<sup>171</sup> The transformation of the transcendental and the expansion of transcendental reflection to include subjectively, but not objectively necessary conditions of our cognition thus also highlights a different relation to the world than the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This new relation gives leeway for aesthetic experience to take up its position according to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The reason is that it allows us to experience by way of example the fact that objects comply with the subjectively necessary conditions of judgment in cases where this is not objectively necessary, and it thereby simultaneously strengthens our hope for an “agreement” with nature that we ourselves cannot guarantee.<sup>172</sup>

## Connections to Cassirer: Specification and Systematicity of the Symbolic

The preceding sections have laid out the epistemological background of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in isolation in order to depict the complexities of

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<sup>171</sup> The altered sections of this quotation all use the phrase “*richten nach*,” which is translated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “conform to”; the alterations have been made to maintain this parallel. -Trans.

<sup>172</sup> Just how closely linked the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is to the expansion and transformation of the conditions of experience is also displayed by the development of the concept of representation [*Darstellung*] that is of increasingly central significance for Kant’s thought. Kant initially speaks of “representation” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* exclusively in the case of mathematical knowledge and the construction of a geometric figure; cf. Schubbach (2017). Subsequently, the concept is expanded up through the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, to the point that every reference, not merely the constructive, of the concept to an intuition of the object, and thereby ultimately any form of cognition, is understood as “representation”; cf. Schubbach (2019). The ability to be cognized would then be the ability to be represented, but precisely this latter proved to be a problematic assumption of reflective cognition in the case of the empirical and on the basis of the givenness of concrete objects, since it has to presuppose not merely *a priori* conditions, but also conditions that have to be put to the test empirically. This development of the concept of representation seems to me to be closely linked with the developments of Kant’s day in the history of science, as well as in the history of literature and art, as I will attempt to demonstrate in a new project. Concerning the discussion of the concept of representation up to this point, cf. the important article by Winfried Menninghaus (1994), as well as Thomas Sören Hoffmann (2011). Furthermore, with a view to Cassirer’s understanding of representation, cf. Barbara Naumann (1998, pp. 52–65).

the question in Kant as accurately as possible. In what follows, I will now demonstrate on this foundation the way in which Cassirer takes up Kant's work in order to blaze a trail for his philosophy beyond the limits of epistemology and philosophy of science.<sup>173</sup> I will therefore outline Cassirer's interpretation of Kant and his systematic points of connection via the theory of the scientific concept and the conception of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" in reciprocal relation to one another. It will become apparent that the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its "First Introduction" had already become the focus of Cassirer's interest, both as an interpreter and in a systematic respect, shortly after its first appearance in the year 1914. As such, in his interpretation of Kant, he does not merely present the way in which Kant deals with the relation of universal and specific, *a priori* and empirical conditions of cognition, but rather takes up this discussion systematically as well in order to broaden his philosophy beyond epistemo-criticism and to conceptualize a comprehensive "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

Cassirer's interpretation of Kant around 1917 is documented in great detail primarily in *Kant's Life and Thought*, which appeared as the "conclusion" of the edition of Kant's *Werke* for which Cassirer had responsibility. The "manuscript" was already, according to information provided by the foreword, "ready for the press in the spring of 1916," and so it was composed before the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" (Cassirer 1981, p. 2). The extensive chapter on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* does not merely demonstrate that Cassirer is now attributing to this work a greater importance than he did, for example, in the second volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* from 1907.<sup>174</sup> It also substantiates just how central the "First Introduction" had become for Cassirer's interpretation of the third *Critique*. That is, Cassirer does not merely concede to it "the fundamental question which is both the most profound and the most comprehensive" (Cassirer 1981, p. 294). He also bases on it the thesis of "a change in the mutual systematic arrangement of all the basic critical con-

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**173** On Cassirer and Kant, cf. also the enlightening study by Christiane Schmitz-Rigal. She chooses a different methodological approach in that she does not situate Cassirer's interpretation of Kant and his philosophy of science in alignment with a productive problem area, but rather begins with a more classical view of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; cf. Schmitz-Rigal (2002, pp. 24–50).

**174** The last chapter of the volume is devoted to Kant and the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with the conclusion opening up the ethical perspective; cf. *ECW* 3, pp. 635–638. This conclusion was apparently taken up in an unaltered form from the first edition from 1907. "Kant's aesthetics" is mentioned here only once, under the very traditional point of view of its "systematic connection" of freedom and causality. The significance of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* for the question of knowledge is not yet in view here.



cepts previously acquired and established” (Cassirer 1981, p. 287). Cassirer apparently does not limit himself to labeling the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as an aesthetics in the post-Hegelian sense or understanding it as a systematic keystone of critical philosophy. He does not view Kant as the compulsive “architectonic spirit” that he was often thought to be, but rather as a philosopher who had continued to struggle with problems that had long seemed to many Kantians to be solved.<sup>175</sup> Cassirer thus, with the help of the “First Introduction,” works out the real problem that caused Kant to add to his two *Critiques* a third one in the first place, and he will draw out systematic uses for his own philosophy from this historical undertaking.<sup>176</sup>

After Cassirer has introduced the distinction between the determining and the reflective judgment in *Kant’s Life and Thought*, he immediately begins to address the foundational “problem of concept formation,” following up with a not atypical retrospective in the history of philosophy that begins with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Cassirer 1981, p. 276). This retrospective has first and foremost the task of justifying the common treatment of the concepts of purpose and the beautiful in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by retracing their traditional connection in a few quick steps. Cassirer thereby immediately puts into focus the “relation between the particular and the general – which is expressed through the concept” (Cassirer 1981, p. 276). “Speculative metaphysics” would attempt to explain this problematic relationship by means of the assumption that the “structuralization which actuality displays as a whole as well as in its individual parts, in general and in particular” is to be guaranteed by a “supreme absolute understanding”: “The actual is form and has form, because behind it stand a formative Intelligence and a supreme Will-to-form” (Cassirer 1981, p. 279). On Cassirer’s depiction, this “metaphysical and speculative unfolding of the problem of form” does not merely set up the well-known Kantian distinction between the “*intellectus archetypus*” and the “*intellectus ectypus*,” which Cassirer takes up yet again at the end of the chapter (Cassirer 1981, p. 283).<sup>177</sup> Primarily, as Cassirer traces by way of Spinoza with brief glimpses into the 18th century, it anticipates the “transcendental presupposition” of the reflective judgment.<sup>178</sup> The reason is that, from the perspective of critical philosophy, the “standpoint of the unconditioned and creative intellect” is tied together with

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175 McLaughlin (1990, pp. 145–148) has already argued vehemently against the cliché of Kant’s “systematic spirit,” which probably goes back in its essentials to Erich Adickes and which has but little interpretive benefit.

176 Cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 271–273 and 294), as well as *ECW* 9, pp. 211f.

177 Cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 348–354).

178 Cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 299–301).

the “empirical mode of observation” of classification, which is only capable of bringing the individual under universal concepts and apprehending it in terms of its specific order under the assumption of a thoroughgoing formedness of the world (Cassirer 1981, p. 279).<sup>179</sup>

Cassirer thus develops his view of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in light of the background that was reconstructed in the preceding sections as its underlying problem in the context of epistemology. Kant introduced the reflective judgment and its assumption of specific laws in order to go beyond the level of physics, which had constituted the paradigm for knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to take into account biology and chemistry as well, the peculiarity of their empirical knowledge and their methodological assumptions. Cassirer pursues Kant’s return to the premises of his philosophy carefully, and he thereby works out the conceptual challenge of empirical cognition for critical philosophy. He does not merely explain the practical method and the difficulties of empirical research with the help of physics and biology.<sup>180</sup> In addition, he concedes to biology a legitimacy in its own right and its own form of knowledge, and so he ultimately discusses the question of to what extent there is conflict between physics and causality, on the one hand, and biology and its teleology, on the other. As has been discussed up to the present day, Cassirer thus argues that both principles – mechanism and teleology – are of a heuristic character and can thereby be understood as complementary maxims of the reflective judgment.<sup>181</sup>

If Cassirer retraces this apparently merely historical, but systematically speaking highly consequential context in *Kant’s Life and Thought* with great at-

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**179** “For the empirical mode of observation, which proceeds from particular things and remains the prisoner of comparison and collection of particulars, there is no other way to progress to the laws of the actual than to note the likenesses and differences of particulars and to unite them in this way in classes and types, in empirical ‘concepts.’ But how would this empirical form of concept, as a union of particulars in space and time into logical species, be possible, if the actual were not in fact so ordered that it is adapted and fitted to the form of a conceptual system? Everywhere that we seem merely to array particular with particular, to pass from the special case to the genus and to divide this once more into species, a prior, implicit, deeper assumption holds way. Without the assumption that the world as a totality possesses a pervasive, all-embracing logical structure, so that one can find no element in it which is totally unconnected with all else, sheer empirical classification and comparison would lose all force” (Cassirer 1981, pp. 279 f.).

**180** He initially accounts for them in the context of physics from Galileo to Newton, although with the subsequent aim of emphasizing them in full in the context of biology and other “descriptive and classifying sciences”; cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 289–293).

**181** Cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 340–349, in particular pp. 345 f.).

tention, then he must simultaneously understand this discussion as a challenge to the foundational assumptions of his own theory of the scientific concept as well. The relation between physics and biology is thus, for Cassirer as it had been for Kant, not only one example within a well-grounded and well-developed philosophical argument. Rather, it represents a renewed challenge and will compel Cassirer to return to his previous considerations concerning the conditions of cognition and the task of philosophical reflection in order to put them to the test once again. The reason is that Cassirer, like Kant, but also like his teacher Cohen, had initially oriented himself closely on the exact sciences and formulated his theory of the functional concept in that context. This theory was supposed to be valid for all forms of cognition, and it located the beginnings of scientific cognition already in simple perception. Nevertheless, at the same time, it remained indelibly stamped by mathematical physics, and thereby had conspicuous difficulties with other disciplines. In *Substance and Function*, the “descriptive and classifying sciences” were thus associated with the Aristotelian empirical theory of the concept that Cassirer viewed as his primary opposition.<sup>182</sup> And chemistry attained a noteworthy special status that set it at a clear remove from the other disciplines under consideration.<sup>183</sup> As little inclined as Cassirer was at first to take biology and chemistry seriously as epistemological challenges, he would also have had to understand the Kantian revision of the foundations of critical philosophy that was motivated by those disciplines as a questioning of his own philosophy.

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**182** Cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 11f. and 264f.).

**183** Thus, in *Substance and Function*, Cassirer occasionally seems to assume that chemistry would converge with mathematics by way of number (cf. Cassirer 1923, pp. 203f. and 216–220); according to Cassirer’s analysis, however, its concepts are occasionally distinguished from other basic scientific concepts. Cassirer understands the concept in chemistry of the atom, e.g., as an idea in Kant’s sense, such that the rather substantial insight on the part of the chemist would come into conflict with epistemo-critical analysis; cf. e.g., Cassirer (1923, pp. 208–211). This analysis is strikingly distinct from Cassirer’s approach to physics, but it nevertheless ultimately remains quite unclear. Hermann Cohen too had initially hoped that biology and chemistry could be dissolved into mathematics; cf. by way of example Cohen (1883, pp. 143f.) and his introduction to the ninth edition of Friedrich Albert Lange’s “History of Materialism” (“Geschichte des Materialismus”; Cohen 1914, pp. 70f.). He has certainly given up this hope later when he seeks to integrate biology and chemistry into his system; cf. Cohen (1885, pp. 56–59 and 508–516). To my knowledge, Cassirer will openly declare the independence of the “object” of chemistry for the first time in *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* from 1920 (cf. Cassirer 1923, pp. 446f.), when he had long since drawn out the consequences from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and had already made progress in his work on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”

His reading of the “First Introduction” thus represents at first a hack at Cassirer’s theory of the concept, since it put the presuppositions of that theory partially into question. In particular, this thesis is confirmed emphatically by the essay “The Fundamental Problems of Kantian Methodology and their Relation to Post-Kantian Speculation” [“Die Grundprobleme der Kantischen Methodik und ihr Verhältnis zur nachkantischen Spekulation”] from 1914, which continues to stand totally under the influence of the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>184</sup> In this essay, Cassirer does not merely emphasize Kant’s revision of the foundations of critical philosophy, but also touches on the consequences for his own philosophy. The *Critique of Pure Reason* now almost appears to be a first attempt to formulate the question of the relation between the universal and the particular, a task at which only the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* succeeds in a satisfactory way: instead of equating the difference between the universal and the particular with the distinction between form and matter and with that between concept and intuition in an unreflective manner, and thereby ultimately being able to understand any specification of laws merely as their schematization for an intuition, the third *Critique* – and its “First Introduction” in particular is the loudest voice here – introduces for the first time the various levels of universality and particularization by inquiring into the specific laws that are peculiar to biology like those in physics: “In the first version, the question essentially conflates universality with the rules of the understanding, and particularity with the datum of sensory intuition. The *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in contrast, raises the problem immediately to a higher standpoint by inquiring into the ground and the transcendental legitimacy of the *particularization of the laws of the understanding themselves*” (*ECW* 9, pp. 212f.).

This assessment might appear more innocuous than it actually is if we do not bear in mind how central that “first version of the question” was for *Substance and Function*. It is not simply that Cassirer had understood the “real result of the methodological analysis of scientific knowledge” in the first part to be that of depriving “the opposition of the universal and the particular of its metaphysical character” (Cassirer 1923, p. 237).<sup>185</sup> The achievement of the concept consist-

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. this essay in *ECW* 9, pp. 201–216. Admittedly, Cassirer does not mention the “First Introduction” explicitly in 1914; such a reference can first be found in the reprint of the text for the introduction of the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* from 1920; cf. *ECW* 4, p. 13, n. 5.

<sup>185</sup> He continues: “The law and the fact appear no longer as two eternally sundered poles of knowledge; but they stand in living, functional connection, related to each other as means and end. There is no empirical law, which is not concerned with the connection of the given and with inferring not-given groups of facts; as, on the other hand, each ‘fact’ is established with reference

ed specifically in the comprehension of every particular under itself as one instance of a law, and therefore being already presupposed in the particular. Consequently, every particular can only be conceived of under the presupposition of per se universal laws and concepts. It is the inseparability, for which Cassirer often argues, between form and content from which he infers that every particular pertains solely to the content, but not the form. In one passage dealing with this theme from *Substance and Function*, Cassirer thus actually speaks at one point of the “*particularization* of a law,” but he wants to make it clear that he understands by that phrase exclusively the “material particularity of the empirical content,” and therefore its determination by the form instead of its own unique specification (Cassirer 1923, p. 311).<sup>186</sup> This “particularization of a law” operates on the level of the law’s schematization for the individual case, an idea which Cassirer already viewed as having been overcome by the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in his essay from 1914. He had, therefore, to perceive even his own theory of the concept as outdated. It required an expansion with respect to the “particularization” of the concepts themselves.

As the first chapter has demonstrated, this systematic challenge was also raised in Richard Höningwald’s review of *Substance and Function* from 1912.<sup>187</sup> Namely, Höningwald had objected to the just-quoted reflection by Cassirer on the “particularization of a law” by claiming that there were nevertheless two tasks to be distinguished: on the one hand, the “‘*particularization*’ of a law for all cases” and, on the other, “its ‘particularization’” itself, which is supposed to be characteristic of various methods and disciplines.<sup>188</sup> One year later, in

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to a hypothetical law, and receives its definite character through this reference” (Cassirer 1923, p. 311).

**186** “For the particularization of a law presupposes this law and is only intelligible with reference to it; hence the particular, fixed value always remains in the sphere of that concept of being, that is defined and limited by the universal principles of mathematics. This limitation, however, constitutes the true ‘ideality’ of a value” (Cassirer 1923, p. 311). For a similar view of the “particularization undergone by the universal rules,” cf. also *ECW* 9, p. 278.

**187** Cf. Höningwald (1912a). On this controversy, cf. also the section “Particularizations of the Concept: The Demand of Richard Höningwald” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 70–74. above.

**188** “It is doubtless correct that ‘the *particularization*’ of a law in any case ‘simply presupposes this law itself.’ But never does it follow that only the ‘law’ and not also its ‘particularization’ could be made the object of particular scientific investigations. In relation to this problem, there are two and only two possibilities. Either the possible differentiation of the content, thus the particular cognitive function of the concept as an independent task of epistemological considerations as such, will be denied and the actually existing diversities deduced from the *universal* cognitive function of the concept as such; or that diversity of content will, independently

1913, Cassirer was still operating entirely on the basis of *Substance and Function* and defended its parallelization of the distinction between universal and particular with that between law or concept and individual case or intuition. The “thoroughgoing particularization in which every experiential knowledge stands and consists for us” should – according to Cassirer in his response to Höningwald’s critique, as before but more explicitly – be understood in the sense that a concept or a law determines every particular. He even carries this thesis to its highest point when he takes a stand in favor of an “understanding of idealism that has absorbed this particularization into its principle itself” (*ECW* 9, p. 165).

By all appearances, it is his reading Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its “First Introduction” that persuades Cassirer, in contrast, that the question of the “particularization” of the laws itself represents an independent problem. Thus, in his interpretation of Kant, the assumption of biology, that nature can be classified into genera and species, can no longer be understood as the expression of a view of the concept that ought to be rejected on philosophical grounds. Rather, it now counts for Cassirer as an assumption that is characteristic for “the total form of the descriptive and classificatory sciences,” and it therefore represents a philosophical challenge that must be taken seriously (Cassirer 1981, p. 293). He therefore takes a sharper look at the various “cognitive functions”<sup>189</sup> and “forms of cognition”<sup>190</sup> by means of which the experience and the object are related to one another correlatively, albeit in a peculiar manner in each case. Cassirer, however, also takes up this view of the particular laws of various disciplines and the specific orderings of their objects in a systematic respect and reinterprets his own theory of the concept anew on this foundation. Thus, as the first chapter has demonstrated, an interest in the particularization of the basic concepts of various mathematical fields and disciplinary forms of knowledge already prevails in the *Disposition* from 1917.<sup>191</sup> Cassirer emphasizes in this context not merely the “specific laws of construction” or forms of individual

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of the universal cognitive function of the concept, albeit in constant relation to it, become an *independent* problem for the philosophy of science” (Höningwald 1912a, p. 2889).

**189** “The analogy here to the ‘revolving of the spectator’ consists in our reviewing all the cognitive functions at the disposal of reason in general, and examining each one individual, both as to its necessary mode of validity and as to its characteristically determinate and limited mode of validity” (Cassirer 1981, p. 149).

**190** “Even the transcendental philosophy intends to treat the various forms of objectivity, and must do so; but each objective form is conceivable by it and accessible to it only as mediated by a specific form of cognition” (Cassirer 1981, p. 154).

**191** Cf. primarily the section “The ‘Logic of the Symbolic’: The Specific Form of the Logical Concept” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 64–70 above.

scientific concepts; rather, he also attempts to characterize their specificity in reciprocal, systematic connection to basic concepts of the exact sciences.

Thus, Cassirer takes up the question of the relation between universal and particular laws, which represents one of the decisive innovations of Kant's "First Introduction," in order to interpret his own theory of the scientific concept anew and to develop it further. Thereby, however, he simultaneously opens up a more comprehensive perspective on the universality and specification of forms of experience, within which Cassirer situates Kant's entire body of work and in which context, furthermore, he will conceptualize his "Philosophy of the Symbolic." In his interpretation of Kant, on the one hand, he defines the judgment as that most universal *a priori* structure that is characteristic of every experience as a correlation between subject and object.<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, however, this *a priori* pertains to its various forms "in the specific validity and the particular nature of determinate judgments" (Cassirer 1981, p. 285).<sup>193</sup> According to Cassirer, these forms are prescribed by the three *Critiques*: in theoretical, practical, and aesthetic judgment, therefore, we can see *a most universal a priori* of the correlation between experience and object in "the strict particularity of its specific applications" (Cassirer 1981, p. 323).<sup>194</sup> The concept of judgment is thus generalized beyond the level of knowledge and simultaneously related to the necessity of its specification. It is this movement, which Cassirer understands as a condition for "Kant's aesthetics," that he will only discuss much later in *Kant's Life and Thought*, namely in the fourth section of the chapter on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: "An extension and deepening of the concept of the *a priori*

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**192** The decisive definitions of judgment in this context can be found in the chapter on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. At first, Cassirer focuses there on logic in the transcendental sense for the characterization of Kant's "revolution in the way of thinking" and allows the necessity of the conceptual judgment to become the pivot and linchpin of his interpretation. Grounded in this necessity, namely, is the objectivity of knowledge, both in the sense of its objective validity as well as in the form of its relation to the known objects; cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 146–148 and 172f.).

**193** A similar perspective appears in outline at the end of the first part of *Substance and Function*, but it remains, as far as I can see, without systematic consequence; cf. Cassirer (1923, pp. 232f.).

**194** Cassirer thus sees in the second and third *Critiques* "special formative principles" for each work respectively, by which he is referring to the "realm of ends, the image of which is sketched by ethics" and the "realm of pure shapes and forms disclosed to us in art" (Cassirer 1981, p. 150). The three *Critiques* thus represent "multiple objective mental directions" in their "essential individuality and proper limitation" (Cassirer 1981, p. 154).

in theory first makes possible the *a priori* in aesthetics and paves the way for its determination and perfection” (Cassirer 1981, p. 304).<sup>195</sup>

Consequently, Cassirer interprets the totality of the three *Critiques* as a systematic unfolding of one and the same structure of judgment and therefore of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, in order to bring into view an expansion of the critical project to the “entirety of intellectual and spiritual culture” (Cassirer 1981, p. 154). As such, it can hardly be surprising that this systematizing interpretation of Kant’s *Critiques* is deeply intertwined with the systematic development of Cassirer’s own philosophy. Such a thesis is not merely obvious because Cassirer constantly affirmed the connection of systematic and historical work that was central to Marburg Neo-Kantianism.<sup>196</sup> What Cassirer interprets as Kant’s development of a system, furthermore, corresponds quite precisely to his own progress on the path towards a “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” As the first chapter of the present study was able to demonstrate with the help of the *Disposition* from 1917, Cassirer had not merely developed his theory of the concept from *Substance and Function* further in light of the particularization of concepts, but rather also carried out a decisive *generalization* of the conceptual foundations of his epistemological writings and simultaneously

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**195** Cassirer carries out this transition in the following sentence: “Because it has been shown that the condition of the universal laws of the understanding is necessary but not sufficient for the complete form of experience; because a singular form and a singular teleological connection of the particular was discovered, which in its turn first completed the systematic concept of experience, a moment of consciousness is sought on which the lawfulness of the particular and contingent is stamped” (Cassirer 1981, p. 304). Cf. also Cassirer 1981, pp. 305f. and 316f.

**196** Cf. *ECW* 2, pp. IXf. This passage is part of the “Foreword to the First Edition” of the first volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* from 1906. In intertwining systematic inquiry into the “problem of knowledge” with the recollection of its history, Cassirer is following guidelines laid down by Cohen, who constantly connected his systematics with the history of philosophy, as Cassirer also emphasizes; cf. Cassirer (2015a, here pp. 221f.). In so doing, Cohen already did not merely want to connect philosophy as closely as possible with the history of mathematical natural science, but rather also to orient it on an idealist theory of scientific knowledge that had its beginnings in Plato, found its decisive continuation in Kant, and received its necessary clarification in the “epistemo-critical idealism” of Cohen. Paradigmatic for this line of thought is Cohen (1883, in particular pp. IIIf. and 11f.). For more detail and on the role of Plato, cf. Cohen (1914, pp. 7–28, in particular pp. 13–24, as well as 69f.), and the historical part in Cohen (1885, pp. 1–79). To my knowledge, Cassirer never puts this view of history into question directly; however, his works on the history of philosophy do cause Cohen’s idea that Kant is a “peak of the mountain range that begins with Plato and that, among the more recent, leads through Descartes and Leibniz” to appear questionable, at least in practice, even from an early stage (Cohen 1914, p. 58). On the relation between systematics and the history of philosophy in the Marburg school, cf. also Renz (2002, pp. 118–128).



connected them to the task of *respecification* for various fields of culture: as the expansion of judgment beyond the domain of knowledge in Kant ultimately led to an *a priori* of judgment *in general* and a system of its *specifications*, “the symbolic” has taken the place of the functional-relational concept in order to contain within itself some of the *most universal characteristics* of that concept and simultaneously to relate them to the *diverse forms* of cultural symbolization.<sup>197</sup> Like Kant on Cassirer’s interpretation, Cassirer himself also carries out an “expansion and deepening of the concept of the *a priori* in *theory*” in order to link up with his epistemo-critical theory of the concept and simultaneously to develop it into a conception of the symbol that is rooted in the philosophy of culture.<sup>198</sup>

Just how closely Cassirer’s new systematic approach is bound up with his rereading of Kant under the auspices of the “First Introduction” is demonstrated particularly clearly by the Neo-Kantian motif of the Copernican turn, which Cassirer invokes programmatically in the section on the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic” from the *Disposition* from 1917 as well as in the “Introduction and the Framing of the Problem” of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* from 1923.<sup>199</sup> In the famous “Introduction,” Cassirer first characterizes the “revolution in the way of thinking that Kant undertook within theoretical philosophy” with the immediate and explicit intention of emphasizing yet again the fact that this revolution initially includes exclusively the “pure, logically determined object.” However, “as soon as Kant progresses, in the totality of the three critiques, to develop the true ‘system of pure reason,’” it turns out that, for an object that is comprehended in this manner, “this form of objectivity is too narrow.” Thus,

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**197** A similar connection of his own philosophical systematics with the systematization of Kant’s philosophy had already been carried out by Cohen. Cohen, however, held fast to the primacy of logic in his *System of Philosophy* more clearly than Cassirer, in that he built on the concept of law and understood it as a concept of logical provenance that has application in ethics and aesthetics; cf. Cohen (1914, pp. 43–45). In his assessment of Cohen’s work from the year 1912, Cassirer spoke on these connections, but certainly did not focus his reflection on the universality and specificity of laws; cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 122f. and 128–134. And yet, in hindsight, Cassirer’s later perspective seems to be indicated at least in this passage: “The overarching idea of *validity* is specified within this unity [the systematic unity of the productive modes of consciousness, A.S.] in its various subtypes” (*ECW* 9, p. 138).

**198** This can be substantiated in a more detailed manner by the well-known programmatic passages from “Goethe and Mathematical Physics” [“Goethe und die mathematische Physik”] from 1920 in *ECW* 9, pp. 268–315, here pp. 301–304, where Cassirer broadens his perspective on Kant immediately to language with the help of Humboldt. On this essay, cf. also the interpretation by Yoshihito Mori (1995).

**199** On the “Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” cf. the corresponding section in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 92–112 above, and for the following citations from the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, cf. *ECW* 11, p. 8.

the concept of an object becomes broader and deeper via the logical unfolding of that “revolution” and its incorporation of other forms of objects: “the Copernican revolution ... no longer refers only to the logical function of judgment but extends, with equal justification and right, to every tendency and every principle of spiritual configuration ... For the basic principle of critical thinking, the principle of the ‘primacy’ of the function over the object, assumes in each special domain a new shape [*Gestalt*] and demands a new and dependent grounding.”<sup>200</sup> Cassirer draws out the consequences of his interpretation of Kant’s *Critiques* in the famous programmatic formulation: “the critique of reason becomes a critique of culture” (*ECW* 11, p. 9). This program, however, was preceded by a careful rereading of Kant that is anything but obvious, and which was extremely condensed in this formulation.

The conception of Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of culture should thus be viewed constantly in the context of his interpretation of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and the “First Introduction.” As a consequence, however, the relationship between the “universal” and the “particular” is central for Cassirer’s philosophy of culture as well as for his own theory of the concept, and in particular we must inquire into the relationship between the symbolic and the specific forms of symbolization. The decisive agenda can be seen in the fact that Cassirer follows in the footsteps of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by not attempting to derive the specification of the symbolic from a prior philosophical concept, but rather understanding it as an unfolding of an irreducibly empirical and historical process. For the self-understanding of his philosophical reflection, the status of his own terminology, and the question of the systematics of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” this connection is of decisive significance, a fact which will be presented in detail at the conclusion of this chapter.

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**200** To avoid misunderstandings, I would like to cite the omitted sentences here: “The crucial question always remains whether we seek to understand the function by the formation [*Gebilde*] or the formation [*Gebilde*] by the function, which we choose to ‘ground’ the other. This question forms the spiritual bond that connects the most diverse problems with one another – it constitutes their inner methodological unity, without ever letting them lapse into a factual one-and-the-sameness [*sachliche Einerleiheit*].”

Again, with this interpretation Cassirer is taking Kant’s three *Critiques* as the unified and systematic unfolding of reality as a whole: “This *gradual* unfolding of the critical-idealistic concept of reality and the critical-idealistic concept of spirit belongs to the most distinctive features of Kantian thinking and is literally grounded in a kind of stylistic law of this thinking. The proper, concrete totality of spirit is not designated in a simple formula and given, as it were, ready-made from the beginning; rather, it develops and finds itself only in the continuous advancing progress of critical analysis itself. The ambit of spiritual being can be designated and determined only as a result of being pursued in this process” (*ECW* 11, p. 8).

The preceding interpretation of Kant's third *Critique* has demonstrated how the introduction of the reflective judgment and its particular conditions is closely connected to the fact that the empirical character of cognition does not merely pertain to the individual contents, but rather also the specific form of this cognition. The reason is that Kant had discussed, for example in the context of biology, that it cannot simply prescribe its specific conditions to the objects, but rather must demonstrate said conditions in the context of those objects in order either to prove its assumptions or, if necessary, to revise them. The notion of more specific, though admittedly no longer deducible, assumptions of the reflective judgment is therefore closely bound up with the empirical character of research, which does not refer to its objects solely in the sense of content, but rather to their formal conditions and their methodological progression. In *Kant's Life and Thought*, Cassirer emphasizes: "For in this case the particular is not deduced from the universal so as to specify its nature, but the attempt is to discover in the particular itself, by successive considerations of the relations it bears within itself, and the similarities and differences which its individual parts show with respect to one another, a connection that can be expressed in ever more comprehensive concepts and rules" (Cassirer 1981, p. 293). As such, it is particularly characteristic of empirical research that the universal cannot be presupposed as *a priori* in order to determine the empirical particular. Rather, a point of connection must first be uncovered in the context of the empirical object, by which means a relationship can be established between the universal and the particular, thereby establishing the concept through which the object can be apprehended at least provisionally. In fact, the concept is specified here as the relation of the universal to the particular in dependence on the empirical sources of knowledge.

This metaphorical language of the "sources of knowledge" is, at the start, an expression of a theoretical dilemma in light of the difficulties of finding a more adequate description under the given presuppositions. For Cassirer, the empirical aspects of cognition cannot in any case be limited to intuition, which he, in the tradition of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, does not regard as an independent dimension of experience.<sup>201</sup> Hönlingswald's recourse to a "material factor" of expe-

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**201** The fact that intuition can no longer count as an "independent and idiosyncratic source of certainty" is a central point of Cassirer's theory of the mathematical concept, which he sees as being in accordance with the "immanent development of Kant's teaching"; cf. "Kant and Modern Mathematics" ["Kant und die moderne Mathematik"] from 1907, *ECW* 9, pp. 37–82, in particular pp. 61–69, here p. 65. Cassirer refers to Cohen's *The Logic of Pure Knowledge*; Cohen strikes to the heart of the "collision between intuition and thinking," as he also does in Cohen (1914, pp. 59–68

rience that “emerges in biology or history ... in palpable independence” would have been just as little satisfying to him (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2894). The reason is that the *a priori* and empirical components of knowledge can, according to Cassirer, no more be distinguished analytically in recourse to the differences between form and content, universal and particular, law and individual case, than they can be separated from one another as two “sources” of knowledge. To put it differently, however, this means that any reflection on the form, the universal, and the law of knowledge must, on the one hand, begin with the content, the particular, and the individual, as Cassirer emphasizes: “Nowhere else than in the particular, as now becomes obvious, is the function of the ‘universal’ representable. In this respect, the notion at which the doctrine of schematism aims first found its decisive complement and fulfillment in the ‘*Critique of the Power of Judgment*’” (ECW 9, p. 211). On the other hand, however, it follows from that fact that reflection can no longer bring about any distinction in principle of the *a priori* from the empirical if it is already constantly bound up with the content, the particular, and the individual in the context of the empirical specification of its formal, universal, and lawful presuppositions. This reflection thus does not, as in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, transcend empirical experience without further efforts to the level of its most universal prior conditions. It deals with the specific and particular laws of empirical knowledge, which are by no means independent of concrete experience and its empirical progression.<sup>202</sup> The reason is that form, concept, and law are only specified as such in empirical cognition in such a way as to help comprehend the objects as content, particular, and individual. In *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* from 1920, Cassirer expresses this point perhaps most clearly. In the “task” of “progressively relating the realm of ‘forms’ to the data of empirical observation and, conversely, the latter to the former ... ‘form,’ just because it represents the active and shaping, the genuinely creative element, must not be conceived as rigid, but as living and moving. Thought comprehends more and more that form in its particular character cannot be given to it at one stroke, but that the existence of form is only revealed to it in the becoming of form and in the law of this becoming. In this way, the history of physics represents not a history of the discovery of a simple series of ‘facts,’ but the discovery of ever new and more special means of thought”

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and 87–92), where he outlines central features of his earlier piece *The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method*.

**202** In an adaptation of the “Marburg” formulations, Hönigswald made a similar claim: “it has not been doubted that ‘givenness’ [*Gegebensein*] constantly means ‘assignation’ [*Aufgegebensein*]; rather, it is implicitly maintained that every ‘assignation’ presupposes the system of relations that is contained in the concept of ‘givenness’” (Hönigswald 1912a, p. 2901).

(Cassirer 1981, p. 421). The “particularization” of form or concept thus results in a process in which the particular objects are determined provisionally under the assumption of that form or that concept in order to necessitate a revision where needed. The universal and the particular are reciprocally related to one another, such that the particular objects are determined empirically, while simultaneously their conditions are specified.

Thus, in his interpretation of Kant, as in his writings on the philosophy of science in the 1920s, Cassirer does not merely emphasize the fact that philosophical reflection must begin with concrete circumstances, but rather also, as a result, underlines the fact that it constantly deals with empirically specified relationships among the particular and the universal: it does not have any immediate access to universal conditions and constantly reflects on these conditions by way of their specifications in the particular, which is where such reflection begins. What is initially justified by the character of empirical cognition, the fact that such cognition itself specifies its concrete “means of thought” and conditions empirically, will also be the methodological premise of Cassirer’s reflection on the philosophy of culture and will characterize his understanding of the relationship between the symbolic and the forms of symbolization.

This point emerges with particular clarity in the essay “On the ‘Philosophy of Mythology’” [“Zur ‘Philosophie der Mythologie’”] from 1924.<sup>203</sup> It is not just that, in that essay, Cassirer criticizes Schelling’s attempt to derive myth from a “unified concept of the absolute,” because that concept would “ultimately absorb and render unidentifiable the fullness of the concrete, particular differences.”<sup>204</sup> He also points out his path towards confronting this risk by seeking to shift the question of myth onto “the ground of critical philosophy” and simultaneously by expanding the “concept of the ‘transcendental’” (*ECW* 16, p. 176). According to Cassirer, the “method of critical analysis” must, as in the classic case of objective

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**203** In: *ECW* 16, pp. 165–195.

**204** I will once again cite the passage in context: “The characteristic advantage and the characteristic limits of Schelling’s idealism emerge clearly at this point. It is the unified concept of the absolute that first assures even human consciousness of its absolute unity in an authentic and definitive way, in that it derives everything that emerges within it as a particular accomplishment, as a determinate direction of mental action, from one common ultimate source. But at the same time, of course, this unified concept includes within itself the risk that it will ultimately absorb and render unidentifiable the fullness of the concrete, particular differences” (*ECW* 16, p. 175). Alongside Schelling’s idealism, Cassirer simultaneously differentiates himself from psychological theories of myth such as ethnic psychology [*Völkerpsychologie*]. I will skip over this aspect at this point for the sake of clarity, with the intention of addressing the relationship of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture to Wilhelm Wundt’s ethnic psychology in the third chapter.

knowledge, “everywhere begin with the ‘given,’ with the empirically determined and secured facts of cultural consciousness; but it cannot remain content with them as merely given. It inquires back from the reality of the fact towards the ‘conditions of its possibility.’ It seeks to demonstrate a determinate hierarchical structure among them, a super- and subordination of the structural laws of the relevant region, a connection and a reciprocal determination of the individual constitutive moments” (*ECW* 16, pp. 177 f.).<sup>205</sup> The vanishing point of this endeavor is formed by the “unity of the spiritual *principle* ... by which all of its particular formations, in all their diversity and in their unmistakable empirical fullness, ultimately show themselves to be governed” (*ECW* 16, p. 178). This “principle” is thus not transcendent and cannot serve as the point of departure for deriving the diversity of empirical phenomena. It is read off from these phenomena and is supposed to account for “the subject of the cultural process, ... the ‘spirit’ merely in its pure topicality, in the multiplicity of its pure modes of formation, and to determine the immanent norm that each of them follows” (*ECW* 16, p. 179). This norm is immanent and therefore stands, like that principle, in a strict reciprocal relationship to the concrete, empirical phenomena with which philosophical reflection begins. As such, Cassirer understands the relationship of universal conditions to their empirical specifications too, following Kant’s “First Introduction,” as a constantly empirical and historical question, and he carries this systematic approach over to the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” and the specification of various forms of symbolization.

Cassirer’s philosophy of culture thereby takes advantage of an approach formulated by Kant that, despite the long-lasting impact of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* over the intervening century, had largely remained without effect, and it departs in particular from German Idealism, which had taken up Kant’s third *Critique* in a completely different way. In the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge*, which appeared in 1920 and for which the already cited text “The Fundamental Problem of Kantian Methodology” was reused as an introduction, Cassirer puts to paper his history of the “post-Kantian systems,” in which he emphasizes over and over again the difficulties of undertaking to sublimate the relationship between universal and particular by, as was the claim, “deriving” or “deducing” the particular from a universal or an absolute that would be super-

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**205** In this context, the “empirically determined and secured facts of cultural consciousness” should be understood as the results of research in the cultural sciences, as Cassirer immediately clarifies: “The proof of this relationship [between depiction, *Abbild*, and the formation of myth, A.S.] cannot, of course, be attempted from above in a purely constructive development, but rather presupposes the facts of mythical consciousness, the empirical material of comparative research into myths and comparative history of religion” (*ECW* 16, p. 181).

ordinate to everything individual.<sup>206</sup> Cassirer maintains that such a project has failed, as becomes particularly clear in the chapter on Hegel in the third volume of *The Problem of Knowledge*. There, Cassirer characterizes Hegel's "absolute idealism" by falling back on Kant's distinction between "*intellectus archetypus*" and "*ectypus*" and attributing to Hegel a pretension to the perspective of the former, the intuitive understanding, which creates from itself and comprehends within itself everything individual.<sup>207</sup> On the other hand, "critical idealism," which Cassirer professes, contents itself with the reflection of the discursive understanding, which attempts to comprehend the given and is capable of reflecting on its conditions. This approach involves a renunciation of a "systematic principle of derivation," but by no means of every sort of "system of basic concepts" (*ECW* 4, p. 355). Admittedly, it is now based on reflection and presupposes with the "fact of science" nothing less than the "pure multiplicity of the basic forms of cognition, which can only be demonstrated as simple factuality" (*ECW* 4, p. 356).

Cassirer's philosophy of culture thus follows a reflective approach that is closely connected to the transformation of the transcendental in Kant's "First Introduction." It is therefore also the "empirically determined and secured facts of cultural consciousness" with which Cassirer's philosophical reflection on the symbolic will begin, instead of taking as its basis a concept of the symbolic from which the diversity of those forms would be derived systematically.<sup>208</sup> This approach, however, is not motivated solely by an anti-idealist impulse characteristic of a Neo-Kantian position. Beyond that, it also implies a particular self-understanding of philosophical terminology, which can now no longer, as the claim goes, be refined on its own terms and serve as a secure foundation for the-

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**206** Concerning Reinhold, cf. *ECW* 4, p. 54f.; on Fichte, *ECW* 4, pp. 191f. and 198–201; with respect to Schelling, *ECW* 4, pp. 244–264, in particular pp. 263f.; for engagement with Hegel, *ECW* 4, pp. 348–363. Primarily the latter section, "Critical and Absolute Idealism" ["Kritischer und absoluter Idealismus"], reveals, by way of its critique of Hegel *ex negativo*, the basic outlines of Cassirer's project of a philosophy of culture, a point which, however, cannot be developed further at this time. In contrast, Cassirer connects the notion of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that not every particular can be derived and that there is thus, in this sense, something specific with the name of Salomon Maimon, whose philosophy he gives a strikingly positive assessment in comparison with the other post-Kantian thinkers; cf. *ECW* 4, pp. 77–120, in particular pp. 86–103 and 116–120. Admittedly, as Cassirer emphasizes, Maimon's work remained largely without impact – like the "First Introduction," I might add; cf. *ECW* 4, pp. 77f.

**207** Cf. *ECW* 4, pp. 349f.

**208** Every attempt at a derivation of the system of symbolic forms therefore seems to miss the mark insofar as it misunderstands the empirical and interdisciplinary character of Cassirer's philosophy of culture; in contrast, cf. by way of example Steve G. Lofts (2000, pp. 56–59).

oretical argumentation. It is thus apparent in the concept of the symbolic in particular why Cassirer's attempts at direct conceptual definitions and terminological clarifications are rare – a fact which has often been noted and criticized – and why instead the concept is supposed to be specified by way of the given phenomena.<sup>209</sup>

In the essay “The Problem of the Symbol and its Place in the System of Philosophy” from 1927, Cassirer describes the positive contribution of this work with concepts explicitly and clearly, as he had seldom done before.<sup>210</sup> He does not merely note that he does not want to enforce the unity of the concept of the symbolic immediately via a definition, but instead to work it out by way of its varied history.<sup>211</sup> In addition, he also insists throughout the subsequent discussion, in contrast to the suggested “terminological determinations” and the demand for a “clear unity of a self-contained concept,” on the “latent unity of a *problem*”<sup>212</sup> that is expressed in the multifaceted flux of significance and application. From such a “latent unity of the problem,” it is worthwhile to work out a unitary concept that is not the result of any terminological fixation by philosophy, but is rather demonstrated in the various forms of symbolization, both in their diversity and in their unity: “As extraordinarily broad as is the range of meanings surrounding the symbolic: the unity of its concept does not for that reason break apart. To me, it seems to be precisely the essential task of a philosophy of symbolic forms to point out this *unity*, the peculiar character of the symbolic *function*

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**209** For one of the few passages that does seem to serve as a definition, though one which has already been given much attention, cf. Ernst Cassirer, “The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Structure of the Human Sciences” [“Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften”], *ECW* 16, pp. 75–104, here p. 79.

**210** Cf. the essay in *ECW* 17, pp. 253–282. The English translation of the main text of this essay contained in *The Neo-Kantian Reader* is listed in the bibliography as Cassirer 2015b, but the translation omits much of the supplemental material. -Trans.

**211** “Does the term ‘symbol’ as it is used today in the philosophy of religion, aesthetics, logic, and the philosophy of science conceal some kind of unified content? Does it refer to an all-embracing function of thought that remains the same in its basic characteristics even though it takes on a new and unique form in each of its outgrowths? But if this is so, where do we find the unifying bond that connects the profusion and variety of meanings which the concept of the symbol has gradually assumed in its immanent development?” (Cassirer 2015b, p. 256).

**212** “But are not all these various uses of the word ‘symbol,’ as we encounter them today in aesthetics and in theory of science, nevertheless supposed to join together into one unity – which today, of course, seems to be less the clear unity of a self-contained *concept* than the latent unity of a *problem*? The *one* thing that I would like to emphasize, in any case, is that all the limitations that have been proposed here in the course of the discussion do not really seem suitable for encompassing the *totality* of uses of the symbol-concept that have prevailed in the various regions of spirit and in systematic philosophy” (*ECW* 17, pp. 280f.).



as such, without thereby allowing it to fall apart into a merely abstract *simplicity*. Only in this way may we hope to do justice to *language* and to *myth*, to *art* and to *theoretical knowledge* in their concrete particularization, and nevertheless without, from the standpoint of theoretical philosophy, all these particularizations having to stand alongside one another as mere individuals, as *dissecta membra*" (ECW 17, p. 281). Holding the concept of the symbolic open in a certain way is thus a systematic necessity of Cassirer's attempt, on the one hand, to understand "the problem of symbolism so broadly that it does not belong exclusively to any single province of thought, but [...] as a systematic focal point towards which all the basic disciplines of philosophy are directed" and, on the other hand, to begin with the diversity of the actually existing forms of symbolization and to preserve them even in reflection on the unity of the symbolic (Cassirer 2015b, pp. 254).

Thus, the concept of the symbolic is not determined by way of a definition, but rather in terms of its specification and in reflection on the basis of diverse phenomena. In this context, Cassirer is no longer limiting himself to knowledge, but rather incorporates all forms of symbolization. He therefore devotes himself, following the *Disposition* for his "Philosophy of the Symbolic," primarily to the task of familiarizing himself with the various forms of experience from the point of view of symbolization. Every existing empirical mode of knowledge concerning art, language, and myth, which are scarcely more than mentioned in the *Disposition*, is thus relevant philosophically, since these forms ultimately specify empirically "the symbolic" that is supposed to constitute the primary object of philosophical reflection. The "Philosophy of the Symbolic" thus begins with the task of bringing the various forms of symbolization into experience, and it seeks to engage with the cultural sciences of its day.

For this reason, the cultural sciences are not merely of interest for Cassirer from the perspective of the philosophy of science.<sup>213</sup> Rather, they are "conversation partners" for a philosophy of culture that is reliant on their knowledge concerning the diversity of cultural phenomena and which has to be rooted in extensive material from the history of culture. Philosophical reflection thus attempts to catch hold of a reality that is complex in its own right with the help of the cultural sciences, a reality in which the symbolic is specified and unfolds in a variety of ways. Cassirer thus also differentiates "*critical apriorism*" from the "romantic, speculative developments" of Kant in that "the *a priori* is not traced back to one single basic metaphysical power of consciousness but is firmly kept with-

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**213** For such a perspective on Cassirer's alleged efforts towards a "foundation for the human sciences" in the Neo-Kantian tradition, cf. by way of example Massimo Ferrari (1988, pp. 118–128).

in the strict particularity of its specific applications” (Cassirer 1981, p. 323). This rejection can be related, not merely to the “basic power of consciousness,” but to any “going back [*Rückgang*]” to a “source of the origin,” as Heidegger thought he observed in his readings of Kant.<sup>214</sup> Cassirer’s philosophy of culture goes in quite the opposite direction when it understands “the” symbolic as *a priori*, but within the empirical and historical context of its “particularizations” and “applications” in order to do justice to a diverse reality.<sup>215</sup>

Cassirer’s writings on the philosophy of culture, therefore, often cover a tremendous mass of material, to the point of occasionally losing the thread of philosophical argumentation, with the text, for long passages, no longer seeming to find its way back to philosophical reflection. This idiosyncrasy of Cassirer’s texts has seldom been made explicit and hardly discussed philosophically at all. If a commenter held this idiosyncrasy to be worth mentioning at all, it was usually with critical intent. For example, Heidegger, in his review of the second volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, urges that “the basic concepts of this system” of symbolic forms be “thoroughly elaborated and brought back to their ultimate foundations” (Heidegger 1997, p. 190).<sup>216</sup> He ultimately draws the conclusion that “such a rich presentation of the phenomena of spirit, running as it does against the dominant consciousness, is never at all philosophy itself,” and therefore probably reserves for his own philosophy the task of taking up anew those “few elementary and basic problems, having remained unconquered since antiquity” (Heidegger 1997, p. 190). Consequently, philosophy would find its other precisely in the “presentation of the phenomena of spirit” and in engagement with the cultural sciences (Heidegger 1997, p. 190).<sup>217</sup> Martin Jesinghausen-Lauster, on

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**214** Cf. Heidegger (1997, pp. 13 and 39). Dorothea Frede reconstructs Heidegger’s going back to the “unity of being” in terms of a similar opposition to Cassirer’s inquiry into the diversity of reality, and she sees therein in particular a possible ground for the failure of *Being and Time*; cf. Frede (2002, in particular pp. 177–181). Heidegger appears here to be closer than he might prefer to Cohen’s theory of the origin, which Cassirer had long since given a different, indeed contrary direction in the transformation of the transcendental; on Cassirer and Cohen, cf. Helmut Kuhn (1949, pp. 556 f.).

**215** Cassirer puts it later in *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*: “Only when we resist the temptation to compress the totality of forms, which here result, into an *ultimate* metaphysical unity, into the unity and simplicity of an absolute ‘world ground’ and to deduce it from the latter, do we grasp its true concrete import and fullness” (Cassirer 1923, p. 446).

**216** The complete review is included in the English translation of Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1997, pp. 180–190). -Trans.

**217** Heidegger’s invective is mentioned here only as one example of many similar remarks that also, against the backdrop of other views of philosophy, assume a similar conflict between Cassirer’s careful depiction of the material and the philosophical character of his texts. Edward Skidelsky suggests in an early general presentation of Cassirer’s philosophy during its own era that

the other hand, plays systematics and history off of one another when he espouses the view that there had been unsolved problems in systematic philosophy that had tempted Cassirer into a “drift into empiricism” and led him, in a “historical turn” during the 1920s, towards relinquishing any systematic claim (Jesinghausen-Lauster 1985, pp. 79 and 58 f.). In contrast, Cassirer, like his teacher before him, began with the fact that systematics and history do not constitute a contradiction, but rather complementary aspects of philosophizing, and already in his earlier works, on occasion, he insisted that some philosophical theses cannot be justified by argument, but rather can only be demonstrated in their material implementation. Thus, both his epistemo-critical texts as well as those on the history of philosophy are characterized by the fact that they seek to substantiate and implement their theses in the context of the material at hand.<sup>218</sup> With the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” moreover, Cassirer draws out a further momentous consequence from his rereading of Kant by claiming that the conditions should no longer be the object of philosophical reflection in terms of their original independence from the phenomena that have been made possible, but rather solely by beginning with these “particularizations” and thus in the context of their “application.” An essential innovation of Cassirer’s philosophy of

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here too a genuinely unique understanding of philosophy has its place: “I now saw that the problems facing Cassirer’s enterprise were far more serious than I had initially supposed. It was not just that many individual aspects of his system had fallen into disrepair, but that the whole thing was no longer obviously *philosophy* at all. Cassirer’s thought is inductive, not deductive in its method. Setting from the variety of human culture, it attempts to comprehend it as an organic whole. But most twentieth-century philosophy, analytic and continental, has sought a standpoint *beyond* the variety of culture” (Skidelsky 2008, p. 5 f.). With respect to Heidegger’s review of the second volume and the passage cited above, Skidelsky clarifies: “Here is the same foundationalist conception of philosophy encountered earlier in the writings of Wittgenstein and his logical positivist followers. For all their differences, Schlick and Carnap might have agreed with Heidegger that Cassirer’s investigation into the forms of human culture was not yet philosophy” (Skidelsky 2008, p. 207).

**218** Thus, Hönlgswald, in his critique that has already been consulted several times, expresses appreciation for “Cassirer’s expositions,” since they are “descended in ‘fruitful bathos’ from engagement with the individual work of the particular sciences. But the problem of this individual work as such only demands a logical legitimacy of its own all the more imperiously; of course, the duty of pursuing it throughout the entire depth of the scientific enterprise thereby also becomes all the more irrefutable. Recognizing this duty, however, means at the same time revising the theoretical presuppositions on which Cassirer’s work rests” (Hönlgswald 1912a, p. 2901). If this “logical legitimacy” of empiricism is supposed to consist, not solely in understanding the formation of concepts by beginning with the concept, but rather also constantly in relation to its objects, then Cassirer would probably have come to this conclusion at the latest in his work on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”

culture is therefore that philosophy no longer gets by without an “empiricism” that it practices essentially in engagement with the cultural sciences.<sup>219</sup> In so doing, his philosophy is not merely following an anti-idealist impulse, but rather also striving towards an answer to the post-Hegelian challenge of philosophy that was entailed by the differentiation and independence of the disciplines of the human and cultural sciences.<sup>220</sup> The alleged weakness of Cassirer’s philosophy, that of losing itself in the material it has amassed instead of supplying conceptual clarifications, does not, for that reason, have to be disputed in its entirety in order to be able to argue that it is the result of a powerful philosophical argument following in the footsteps of Kant and of a new context for philosophizing: it has become unavoidable that we must carry out philosophical reflection by beginning with concrete cultural and historical phenomena and, to accomplish that task, that we must depend on the empirical knowledge of the various cultural and human sciences.

Cassirer thus understands reflection on the philosophy of culture in the context of the knowledge of the cultural sciences, and he interweaves his philosophical terminology closely with empirical findings from the history of culture. The result, however, is not just that the status of this terminology has to be defined anew; in addition, the claim to a philosophical system becomes problematic. Cassirer is certainly aware of this consequence of his reflective process, as will become clear once again with the help of his interpretation of Kant, the consequences of that interpretation for the theory of the concept, and the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” that builds upon it. In his interpretation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment in Kant’s Life and Thought*, this framing of the question serves as a focal point of the theory of cognition. Cognition, which Cassirer takes as his starting point, is essentially grounded in the “system of these concepts [our concepts of reality, A.S.]” (Cassirer 1981, p. 288). In the case of the deductive disciplines like mathematics, this system is the result of the derivation of all concepts from one principle.<sup>221</sup> In the case of empirical knowledge, however, this system must also be able to incorporate “perception” and “sensation.” Cassirer hastens to clarify that this epistemological challenge is in no way identical with that with

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**219** This essential characteristic has occasionally been at least hinted at; cf., e.g., Susanne K. Langer (2012, p. 393) and Wilbur M. Urban (1949, p. 408). With the help of Cassirer’s opposition to Marc-Wogau’s critique, Carl H. Hamburg observes that Cassirer cannot be reduced to the level of pure argumentation, but rather seeks to support his theses by reference to the sciences, an aim which, however, as Hamburg notes, is not unproblematic; cf. Hamburg (1949, pp. 88 f.).

**220** On this point, cf. the section “Turnings towards the World: A Brief Comparison of Cassirer and Dilthey” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 112–122 above.

**221** Cf. Cassirer (1981, pp. 288 f.).

which the *Critique of Pure Reason* had begun.<sup>222</sup> It is not merely that the required “interpenetration of particular laws” can by no means be grounded in the “lawfulness of events as such.”<sup>223</sup> It would also be possible, as Cassirer claims by appealing to Kant, that the opposite could be the case and that our efforts towards knowledge would turn out to be a vain undertaking.<sup>224</sup> Cassirer thus converges on the underlying problem of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* entirely in the sense that has been reconstructed in the present chapter, and he works out in further detail the question of “experience as a system of empirical laws” and of the assumption of a “technique of nature” by the reflective judgment with the aid of the “First Introduction” (Cassirer 1981, pp. 296f.).<sup>225</sup>

Cassirer’s own theory of the concept, however, runs into the same problem as soon as it takes up the “particularization” of the concept as an independent problem against the backdrop of Kant’s third *Critique*. The “effort at the continuous reconciliation of individual things with the particular and the universal,” which Cassirer addresses by reference to Kant, is then neither solely nor primarily related to the relationship between concept and individual case, but rather chiefly to the relationship of “the concept” to its “particularizations” (Cassirer

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**222** “A completely different state of affairs, and hence a totally new problem, is presented as soon as we deal with an empirical manifold instead of a mathematical manifold (such as pure space). This is precisely the assumption that we make in any empirical inquiry: that not only the whole domain of pure intuitions but also the domain of sensations and perceptions itself can be unified into a system analogous and comparable to that of geometry. Kepler not only speculates on the interconnection of conic sections as arbitrarily produced geometrical forms, but he maintains that in these forms he possesses the model of and key to the understanding and exposition of the movements of astronomical bodies” (Cassirer 1981, p. 290).

**223** Cassirer (1981, p. 291): “The concrete structure of empirical science, however, confronts us at the same time with another task ... For here we find not only a lawfulness of events as such, but a connection and interpenetration of particular laws of such a type that the whole of a determinate complex of appearances is progressively combined and dissected for our thought in a fixed sequence, in a progression from the simple to the complex, from the easier to the more difficult.”

**224** “Such comprehensibility cannot be demonstrated and seen as *a priori* necessary through the pure laws of the understanding alone, however. According to these laws, it could be thought that empirical reality indeed obeyed the general premise of causality, but that the various causal sequences which interpenetrate to form it ultimately determine in it a complexity such that it would be impossible for us to isolate and trace out individually the individual threads in the whole sprawling tangle of the actual. In this case, too, it would be impossible for us to grasp the given in the characteristic order which is the foundation of the essential nature of our empirical science” (Cassirer 1981, pp. 291f.).

**225** Cf. Cassirer 1981, pp. 294–306, in particular pp. 296–299.

1981, p. 301).<sup>226</sup> Because Cassirer begins with the “particularizations” of the concept in order to reflect on “the concept” as the prior condition of its “particularizations,” however, a question must be raised that is already nascent in Cassirer’s reply to Hönigswald’s critique of *Substance and Function*. Namely, there he concedes the fact that the “unity of ‘the’ concept” in itself “permits and demands further differences and determinations.” The “particularizations that this function subsequently undergoes via application to determinate individual problems,” however, can certainly raise doubts concerning Cassirer’s assumption that these “particularizations” fit together into that “unity of ‘the’ concept.” Why should such a “unity” exist at all?

This question, which can hardly be avoided any longer against the backdrop of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, becomes even more of a problem for Cassirer when he begins to take the transformation of the transcendental seriously, and can therefore no longer avail himself of any decisive reassurance by Kant. Kant began from the assumption that the most universal conditions of cognition identified in the *Critique of Pure Reason* continue to endure, even if, perhaps, they cannot justify the laws of physics directly. As a result, both “mechanism” and the “teleology” of biology can be understood as merely heuristic maxims of the reflective judgment without touching the assumption of the most universal conditions of cognition that are necessarily applied by the determining judgment. Consequently, the introduction of the particular laws and specific conditions at which the reflective judgment aims by no means has to put that *a priori* framework for cognition in Kant into question. In contrast, on Cassirer’s view, this framework is not given without further efforts. The reason is that the distinction between deducible and necessary conditions of all cognition and the heuristic and historical premises of specific forms of cognition does not, for him, play a central role.<sup>227</sup> In *Kant’s Life and Thought*, Cassirer, with a view to physics and biology, leaves open the question of whether an assumption

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**226** In the chapter on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cassirer characterizes the challenge peculiar to empirical cognition as follows: “The empirical concept must determine the given by progressively mediating between it and the universal, since it relates the data to the universal through a continuous series of intermediate conceptual stages. The highest laws themselves, since they are mutually interrelated, must be specified to the particularities of the individual laws and cases – just as conversely the latter, purely because they are juxtaposed and illuminate one another, must permit the exposition of the universal connections holding between them. Only then do we possess that concrete unification and presentation of the factual our thinking seeks and insists on” (Cassirer 1981, p. 292).

**227** For more detail on Cassirer’s “functional *a priori*,” cf. Schmitz-Rigal (2002, pp. 50–58), as well as, by way of example on the historicity of the *a priori*, *ECW 2*, pp. 3–5. By all accounts, this passage was taken up unaltered from the first edition of the work from 1906.

can, in the final instance, be “deduced as being necessary from universally logical premises” or whether there is a “requirement laid on experience” whose “fulfillment the latter seems in no wise to guarantee” (Cassirer 1981, p. 292f.).<sup>228</sup> Such a requirement may indeed allow us to approach “empirical material not as if commanding but as if questioning and inquiring,” but it is nevertheless, in empirical cognition, brought “right through into the realm of the given” (Cassirer 1981, p. 292f.). Cassirer therefore begins without further ado from the fact that even the principles of the reflective judgment represent *a priori* conditions, because they both guide empirical cognition and qualify its objects concretely. For Cassirer’s understanding of the *a priori*, namely, what is decisive is solely the fact that it represents a presupposition both of the activity of cognition as well as of its objects: “For here, too, it is a matter of an *a priori* principle, since this hierarchy and this formal simplicity of natural laws cannot be deduced from individual experiences, but are the presuppositions that are the only basis on which we are able to systematize experiences” (Cassirer 1981, pp. 289f.).<sup>229</sup> The introduction of specific laws in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, however, certainly signifies a challenge for such an understanding of the *a priori*, because, unlike in Kant, there are no necessary and constitutive conditions governing the merely subjectively necessary and heuristic assumptions of the reflective judgment.

Nevertheless, an enormous challenge for the philosophy of culture results from this situation. The philosophy of culture understands the symbolic as a condition of all culture that is both universal and specific, transcendental as well as historical and empirical. Beginning with the findings of the cultural sciences concerning language, art, myth, or knowledge, it considers a variety of symbolic forms in order to work out their systematic connection. The assumption of a system of symbolic forms is therefore nothing other than a methodological demand

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**228** “And in this way we have also achieved a new transcendental insight of essential significance, for the term ‘transcendental’ must be applicable to any characteristic which does not directly concern objects themselves but which concerns the mode of our knowledge of objects. We discover in nature what we call the affinity of species and natural forms only because we are constrained by a principle of our power of judgment to seek it in nature” (Cassirer 1981, p. 292). This understanding of the *a priori* accentuates one aspect of the *a priori* conditions in Kant, namely their task of making possible or constituting the objects of cognition; in contrast, it allows the aspect of the necessity or deducibility of the conditions to fade into the background. These aspects are distinguished particularly clearly by Friedman (2001a, pp. 30f. and 71–73), although he refers primarily to logical empiricism.

**229** As such, Cassirer, unlike Kant, also does not hesitate to call the assumption of the reflective judgment “objective in the sense that it undergirds nothing less than the status of empirical science and the orientation of empirical research” (Cassirer 1981, p. 294).

for a philosophical reflection that engages with the diversity of reality as it presents itself in the various regions of culture.<sup>230</sup> It is not the foundation of a claim to deductive argument, but rather the goal of being able to deal philosophically with the empirical and historical reality of culture. At the same time, the postulate of such a system should thus be comprehended as a complement to an understanding of the conditions of culture that connects those conditions with their empirical and historical “particularization.” Since the first programmatic remarks on a philosophy of symbolic forms from 1920, therefore, the assumption of a system of the symbolic stands constantly under the premise that we must accentuate and preserve the “particularizations” of symbolization.<sup>231</sup> As a result, however, the question remains as to why such a system should exist at all. On the one hand, it must be demonstrated why a universal structure that is common to all forms of symbolization exists at all, because Cassirer cannot presuppose such a necessary and most universal condition on the basis of his concept of the *a priori* without additional efforts; on the other hand, he would have to demonstrate that all forms of symbolization should be understood as specifications of this symbolic and that as such they form a system that is both unitary and articulated.

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**230** Guido Kreis, in his interpretation of Cassirer’s philosophy, focused on the concept of the system and emphasized its conceptual significance. Because he does not take into account the role of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* for the genesis of Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic, however, he adheres to an unreflective and traditional conception of the transcendental. As a result, he underestimates the difficulties of material “particularization” and the complexity of generalizations and systematization, but also the significance of Cassirer’s reception of the cultural sciences; cf. Kreis (2009, pp. 459–469, as well as the supporting passages on pp. 169–183 and 377–392).

**231** Naturally, I am referring here to the much-discussed passages in “Goethe and Mathematical Physics” (cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 301–307 and 314 f.), as well as *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* (cf. Cassirer 1923, pp. 446 f.). It is simple to see in both texts how the accentuation of the specific helps in opening up a diversity that, on the other hand, raises once again the question of its systematic unity. In the programmatic essay “The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Structure of the Human Sciences” from 1923, Cassirer will ultimately conclude: “Hitherto, we have considered the power of inner formation, which proves itself in the production of the world of art and the world of knowledge, in the production of the mythical and the linguistic world, essentially as a *unity*; we have sought to highlight therein a consistent form of structure, as it were, a universal type. But the true relation among the individual forms only emerges when we now attempt to identify the particular and specific movements of each individual basic tendency within this type and to differentiate them from one another. The function of image formation as such may at least be conceivable as an ultimately comprehensive unity; but the diversity of forms immediately comes to the fore once again as soon as we reflect on the diverse relations that spirit takes up in each of them to the world of images and forms that it produces” (*ECW* 16, p. 91).



Why the relation between the symbolic and its specifications in the forms of symbolization is represented as a systematic connection – to this question, however, Cassirer does not provide any satisfactory answer. The fact that he does not give any theoretical answer and does not undertake any proof of the existence of such a system is self-evident, because he understands his philosophizing, even in connection with the cultural sciences, as a reflective activity, and Kant had already argued that the necessary assumptions of the reflective judgment cannot, in principle, be grounded theoretically. For that reason, Kant had attempted to give an aesthetic answer by conceiving of the beautiful as a reflective judgment, by means of which the assumption of the reflective judgment is confirmed at least in the individual case. Cassirer, however, cannot rely on this answer because he understands aesthetics in a different context: unlike Kant, he attributes an objective reference to the aesthetic judgment and therefore makes use of the conception of the beautiful for the specification of symbolization in the field of the arts.<sup>232</sup> Cassirer comes to a different conclusion: the system of the symbolic and its specific forms is – just as in the case of empirical research – a methodological assumption and can ultimately be confirmed only in its implementation. We are dealing here with the postulate of a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” whose reflection begins with the “particularizations” of the symbolic and which attempts to grasp them in their systematic context.

As a result, in the context of his project of a philosophy of culture, Cassirer is thus exposed to all the problems with which the reflective judgment became entangled in Kant. These problems, however, are no longer merely theoretical, but rather pertain to philosophizing and to the execution of the project itself. The enormity of the challenges that arise with the postulate of a system of symbolizations in particular can already be seen in the first chapter of the present study on the smaller scale of the scientific concept and Cassirer’s efforts towards a “system of exact sciences” in the *Disposition* from 1917. Cassirer failed in the task of identifying a most universal concept for the “particularizations” of the

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**232** Cassirer, unlike Kant, understands the aesthetic judgment in correlation to the object and therefore in reference to a “realm of pure forms, each of which is complete in itself and possesses its own individual center” (Cassirer 1981, p. 306; cf. also the more detailed characterization on pp. 306–311). It thus represents one specific case of judgment, which is distinguished as such primarily by way of the correlation between experience and its object. This correlation is grounded in the systematic context of experience, which is why Cassirer ultimately understands this systematic character in terms of purposiveness. Purposiveness, according to Cassirer, characterizes a “totality” as a “closed system, in which each member possesses its characteristic function; but all these functions accord with one another so that altogether they have a unified, concerted action and a single overall significance” (Cassirer 1981, p. 287).

basic concepts in the various disciplines, and he was therefore, throughout his repeated attempts, obliged again and again to rework the relation between the universality of the conditions and the specificity of the basic concepts of the sciences that were to be justified. As soon as he encountered a concept that could not be reduced to the assumed conditions, he generalized said conditions in order to be able to incorporate that concept as well. The necessary conditions thus, on the one hand, became increasingly more general, which in turn raised the question of whether they are specific enough to be able to justify what they are supposed to justify at all. On the other hand, they nevertheless repeatedly run up against the limits of their universality, a point which became particularly apparent in the transition from the purely mathematical to the empirical concepts of physics and chemistry. The ramifications of this attempt should not be underestimated. It is not merely that Cassirer is automatically faced at this point with the difficulties bound up with the twofold task of the reflective judgment in Kant's sense: namely, on the one hand, the task of reflecting on the universal by beginning with the particular and, on the other, that of specifying the particular by beginning with the universal.<sup>233</sup> Beyond that, he demonstrates in the context of the scientific concept what is characteristic of the method of the new project of a "Philosophy of the Symbolic": the attempt to do justice to the various forms of the concept or the symbolic in their specificity and diversity, without losing sight of the common structural characteristics among all these forms. It is therefore also no accident that the relationship between the unitary determination of the symbolic and the diversity of specific forms, and in particular the "system of 'symbolic forms'" that is envisioned in that context, will hardly prove to be any less problematic for Cassirer (*ECW* 24, p. 374).<sup>234</sup>

A system that is called on to master the empirical diversity, and thus for heuristic purposes, operates within the tension between the projected system, in which the individual would be sublated and derived, and the particularity of the individual from which the system has to be read and in the context of

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**233** This notion from Kant is therefore also found, and hardly by accident, in *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, one of the first published texts outlining Cassirer's new project; cf. Cassirer (1923, p. 444).

**234** Cf. similar formulations in *ECW* 16, pp. 16, 78, and 189, as well as, for the discussion in the secondary literature, Krois (1988, pp. 18–20), and especially Capeillères (2007, in particular pp. 325–336). However, on my view, Capeillères identifies the systematicity of philosophy as being too closely related to its scientificity, both by conflating Cassirer's systematic claim with German Idealism as well as by a mathematical model of the system of symbolic forms; cf. Capeillères (2007, pp. 349–359).

which it has to be put to the test.<sup>235</sup> Thus, what Cassirer says at the beginning of his essay “The Kantian Elements in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Philosophy of Language” [“Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie”]<sup>236</sup> from 1923 with a view to the system of the three *Critiques* also holds true for his own efforts towards a system: this “overall structure of knowledge in its totality and in its particularity is, of course, only an ideal established by critical philosophy” (*ECW* 16, p. 106). It is dependent on historical circumstances and developments, so that any attempted “conclusion” necessarily includes “certain provisional and hypothetical features.”<sup>237</sup> In this context, Cassirer is apparently responding to Humboldt’s philosophy of language, which he portrays as a fruitful evolution of critical philosophy.<sup>238</sup> Nevertheless, his remark on the “provisional and hypothetical” character of any systematic undertaking certainly also applies to his own project of a philosophy of culture. In engagement with studies in the history of culture and in the cultural sciences on language, on myth, on art, or on knowledge, the problem recurs, perhaps even under aggravated conditions, because the diversity of the material here is of a far greater disparity and complexity. In this passage, Cassirer has no theoretical solution, and the promised system cannot be found in his writings. Nevertheless, he does have good philosophical reasons for why there is no theoretical solution here: following Kant’s transformation of the transcendental in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the requirement of a system can only be the postulate of a philosophical work that begins with the concrete phenomena and their specific order. Cassirer thus takes up this work. In the months and years following the outline of the *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” he engages closely with the cultural sciences and strives to carry his philosophical reflection “right through into the realm of the given” (Cassirer 1981, p. 292). Any philosophical re-

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**235** Renz (2002, p. 172) also speaks of the “heuristic function of the notion of the system” in Cassirer, though admittedly neither in reference to Cassirer’s rereading of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* nor with respect to his engagement with the cultural sciences. In contrast, her project is primarily a worthwhile elaboration of the differences and similarities with Cohen’s conception of the system; cf. Renz (2002, pp. 161–174). For similar “deescalating” assessments of Cassirer’s claim to a system of philosophy, cf. Orth (1995, here pp. 105f.). This text was reproduced in Orth (2004, pp. 44–66, here pp. 44f.).

**236** In: *ECW* 16, pp. 105–133.

**237** Directly following the preceding quotation, Cassirer writes: “The fulfillment and implementation of this ideal can only come about in the constant progress of science itself, and cannot be anticipated once and for all in an abstract outline and so be determined for all time. Nevertheless, wherever such a determination is sought, it necessarily includes, alongside its universally valid determinations, certain provisional and hypothetical features” (*ECW* 16, p. 106).

**238** Cf. *ECW* 16, p. 109.

flection that believes itself capable of appealing to universal conditions and concepts without this constitutive detour through empiricism, in contrast, results all too easily in apparently simple solutions.



# The Genesis of the Symbolic and Cassirer's Engagement with the Cultural Sciences

The first two chapters of this study have situated the genesis of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” first in the context of Cassirer’s works and then in the broader framework of the Kantian tradition of philosophizing. In the first chapter, the turn towards a complex world, one that is differentiated in its own right, turned out to be a central motif of Cassirer’s conception of a philosophy of the symbolic. To do justice to the empirical diversity of culture, Cassirer generally accepts, on the one hand, a symbolic that encompasses all forms of the simultaneous “structuring” of subjective experience and objective reality beyond the field of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he relates this symbolic from the outset to its necessary specification into concrete symbolic forms like language or myth. Consequently, philosophical reflection deals simultaneously with the universality of the symbolic and its specification for various types of symbolization, and it has to operate within the conflict situation between universal and specific conditions in order to be able to account for the diversity and complexity of cultural reality.

Ralf Konersmann’s conclusion that the philosophy of culture of the 20th century underwent a turn towards a “world-bearing thought” thus already proves to be true for Cassirer’s first outline for a “Philosophy of the Symbolic.”<sup>2</sup> Cassirer’s approach, however, gives this turn a particular twist, in that he understands what it means for philosophy to be world-bearing in a specific way and, in so doing, makes use of considerations from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as the second chapter has explained. Kant, with respect to the activity of the reflecting judgment, had expanded his conception of the transcendental to encompass the sort of conditions that cannot be prescribed with necessity to the objects that they make possible and which are not given independently of those objects, but must rather unavoidably be assumed in the process of cognition, but also simultaneously verified in the context of those objects and, where necessary, revised. Following Kant’s transformation of the transcendental, therefore, Cassirer locates the way in which reflection on the philosophy of culture is world-bearing

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1 The operative concept of “structuring” [*Aufbau*] that is taken up here permeates Cassirer’s whole work; by way of example, cf. *ECW* 2, pp. 5f., Cassirer (1923, p. 311), and the essay “Language and the Structure of the Objective World” [“Die Sprache und der Aufbau der Gegenstandswelt”], *ECW* 18, pp. 111–126, in particular pp. 111–113. The correlative aspect of structuring is expressed particularly well in the heading of the third section of *Manuscript 1919*, p. 139: “Language and the structuring of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ being.”

2 Cf. Ralf Konersmann (2003, p. 108).

precisely in the genuinely empirical and historical specification of the formal conditions of experience and its objects. It can be seen in the inextricable entanglement of the forms of experience with their empirical and historical contents and in the intertwining of the universal conditions of the symbolic with their multifaceted reality in the forms of symbolization.

Cassirer's understanding of a "world-bearing thought," therefore, is markedly distinct from other contemporary attempts to turn philosophy towards the world. The reason is that the world, in Cassirer, does not merely come into play via the manifold material contents of experience.<sup>3</sup> Such a thesis would al-

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**3** There seems to me to be an essential difference here from two thinkers who likewise dedicated themselves to a "world-bearing" style of philosophy: Edmund Husserl and Georg Simmel. Firstly, Cassirer, chiefly in texts from the 1920s, repeatedly complained that Husserl relied on the differentiation of the material aspects of experience from its formal conditions when reflecting on a transcendental consciousness, the intentional structure of which was supposed to represent the foundation of its relation to the world; cf. *ECW* 13, pp. 223–228, and Cassirer (2015b, pp. 256 f.), as well as, concerning the connection between formal and material elements of experience in general, *ECW* 11, pp. 35–39 and 147. Secondly, Georg Simmel too, with respect to the description of the nature of objective spirit, adheres to the difference between content and form. This can be seen particularly clearly in his generalization of Kant's three *Critiques* in the context of the philosophy of culture in a piece from 1910; cf. Simmel (1996, pp. 7–157, in particular pp. 19–25). From Kant's theory of cognition, namely, Simmel develops the notion that, alongside science, art and religion are also "great forms" that are capable of "establishing even a whole world from the totality of contents" (Simmel 1996, p. 21). Under the presupposition of a given form, therefore, the "world" must appear "as content": "There are a few forms that form world-material into a world, forms that present themselves as an infinity of multifaceted contents" (Simmel 1996, p. 24). As such, Simmel considers the notorious difference to be inescapable: "There is perhaps no necessity of thought from which we can do so little to distance ourselves – despite the fact that it contains neither logical force nor tangibly given actuality – as the analysis of things into content and form" (Simmel 1996, p. 19). The conception of knowledge, art, and religion as universal forms and the world as their concrete content, which is both to be formed and already formed, can thus also be found independently and without any mention of Kant in Simmel's own descriptions of culture or "objective spirit"; cf. Simmel (1996, pp. 447 f.). It is characteristic of Simmel's philosophy of culture that he ultimately opposes the reality of dynamic and living processes to the cultural objectifications in which he sees determinate, worldly contents as being fixed by prior forms. In contrast, for Cassirer, as has already been shown in the headings on the "Metaphysics of the Symbolic" from the *Disposition* from 1917, life will always consist in the entanglement, unfolding, and specification of forms *and* contents. This difference can be seen quite easily in Cassirer's and Simmel's understanding of Goethe's formulation concerning the "imprinted form that develops through living"; cf. Simmel (2003, pp. 91 f.) and *ECW* 16, p. 42. Cassirer incorporates Goethe's formulation as early as in *ECW* 7, p. 262, with a similar, though admittedly less explicit intention and without citation, and he frequently hints at it via the abbreviated formulation of the "imprinted form"; cf.,

ready have been far from Cassirer's mind as a result of his old assumption – already shared by his Neo-Kantian teachers – that the material aspects of experience cannot be separated from their formal conditions.<sup>4</sup> This general assumption was still connected in his epistemo-critical writings with an idealism that views all contents of cognition as being constructed on the foundation of *a priori* conditions. Following the Kantian transformation of transcendental conditions, however, it now has the consequence that Cassirer's philosophy of culture has to situate its ability to be world-bearing within the empirical specification and historical unfolding of forms both of experience and of reality itself.

This programmatic definition of a world-bearing “Philosophy of the Symbolic” can be refined further, not merely by considering it in connection with Kant's transformation of the transcendental, but also by distinguishing it from the systems of German Idealism. Not least among Cassirer's conclusions from the entanglement of the symbolic as a condition of all culture with its empirical specifications in the diversity of symbolic forms is that the diversity of languages and arts, myths and bodies of knowledge cannot be comprehended in terms of any system that would develop necessarily from its beginnings in accordance with an understandable logic. Instead, he begins with a genuinely historical process of the unfolding of the symbolic and reflects on its conditions by beginning with the concrete phenomena of symbolization. Cassirer maintains that universal conditions of culture exist, that they differentiate themselves into symbolic forms, and that the latter form in turn an articulated system. However, as a result, they can no longer be derived from one underlying concept, but rather represent the necessary assumption of a philosophy of culture that, following in the footsteps of Kant's third *Critique*, does not take a deductive approach, but rather a reflective one. Such a philosophy of culture has given up the attempt to prescribe conditions to cultural phenomena and to give a foundation to their diversity. Instead, it opts to begin with the diversity of the phenomena in order to reflect on the conflict situations among universal and specific conditions that allow us to understand the empirical and historical particularizations of culture and simultaneously to inquire into their systematic order.

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e.g., *ECN* 5, p. 128, as well as Massimo Ferrari (2003, pp. 62f.), in particular the additional references to Goethe's phrase in Cassirer in the accompanying note 120.

4 In his records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” Cassirer takes up this central point in the interpretation of Kant once again: “Therefore, it is also never a successful task to assemble these forms from a subjective and objective component, from ‘form’ and ‘matter’ (the incorrect view of Kant!)” (Sheet 9, p. 4). His correct “view of Kant,” however, does not prevent Cassirer from occasionally accusing Kant of an inconsistency in this respect; cf., e.g., *ECN* 1, p. 200, or *ECW* 13, pp. 220 – 223.



Cassirer's philosophy of culture thus begins with the concrete diversity of symbolizations in the history of human culture in order to reflect on their universal and specific conditions and, ideally, simultaneously to carve out the unity and diversity of symbolization in language, myth, art, and knowledge. As such, it also takes up the post-Hegelian challenge of philosophy insofar as it is decidedly based on empirical and historical facts, but does not claim to have such facts at its own command. Instead, it relies on the rich body of knowledge in the cultural sciences and links philosophical reflection with the description of empirical and historical phenomena by the cultural sciences. Consequently, the ability of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic to be world-bearing is not simply derived from the fact that it deals with the expressions or objectivations of human culture. Rather, it takes hold of this sphere with the help of the cultural sciences and their allegedly objectivating discourse, because the question concerning the conditions of symbolization can only be discussed with the aid of their empirical and historical unfolding, and only the comprehensive research of the disciplines of the cultural sciences promises to do justice to human culture in terms of the differentiation and complexity of its historical objectivations. Consequently, the objective spirit, which was such a concern for the early philosophy of culture, first comes into Cassirer's view in terms of its objectivation by the cultural sciences.

As a result, Cassirer's philosophy of culture enters into a close relationship with the cultural sciences and thereby stands in principle within a Neo-Kantian tradition that constantly referred to the sciences and expected of them a high potential for reflection, to the point of associating philosophical concept-formation in particular with their methodological discussions.<sup>5</sup> The reference to the sciences, however, has undergone something of a shift, because Cassirer no longer limits himself to an epistemological perspective, as was already discussed in the final section of the first chapter.<sup>6</sup> The "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is instead based on research in the cultural sciences, in order to be able to apprehend cul-

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<sup>5</sup> The continuity of Cassirer's reference to the cultural sciences with Cohen and Natorp's relation to the natural sciences is emphasized by Helmut Holzhey (1988, pp. 194–197), although he, in my opinion, also underestimates the discontinuities, as well as the systematic differences from phenomenological description. Ferrari also primarily emphasizes the continuities with the Neo-Kantians; cf. in particular Ferrari (1988, p. 121). He thus restricts his view to Cassirer's relationship to the human sciences, but focuses too closely on the problem of their "foundation," thereby ultimately presupposing an unaltered Neo-Kantian "transcendental method"; cf. Ferrari (1988, pp. 125–127).

<sup>6</sup> Once again, cf. on this point the section "Turnings towards the World: A Brief Comparison of Cassirer and Dilthey" in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 112–122 above.

tural phenomena in terms of their inherent diversity and complexity and to deal with specific orderings of the symbolic as well as the particularizations of its conditions.

The *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* thus chooses, as Cassirer puts it retrospectively in the outline of the planned fourth volume, “the path that leads through the *concrete* structure of spirit” (ECN 1, p. 27). In the “Introduction” to the second volume, however, Cassirer clarifies with a view to the “method of critical analysis” that this path is open to the philosopher only with the help of the materials and descriptions of the cultural sciences: it stands “between the methodologies of metaphysical-deduction and psychological-induction” and must “always begin from the ‘given,’ from the empirically ascertained and secured facts [*Tatsachen*] of cultural consciousness” in order, however, unlike psychology, to inquire into the foundation of this “reality of the factum ... into the ‘conditions of its possibility’” (ECW 12, pp. 13f.).<sup>7</sup> With rare candor, Cassirer observes the resulting close connection between the “problem of the philosophy of symbolic forms” and “immersion in the empirical material” in the outline “Concerning Basic Phenomena” [“Über Basisphänomene”] from approximately 1940: “History of language, of myth, of religion, of art, of science: they form the “matter” of the philosophy of symbolic forms, and without this matter, which it owes to the particular sciences, it would not be capable of taking one step forwards – but now it carries out *its* turn towards the universal – which leads it neither to *psychological* universals (basic powers of the ‘mind’) nor to *metaphysical* universals (‘phenomenology of spirit’ in the Hegelian sense as a demonstration of the dialectical levels of spirit’s development and self-unfolding), but probably to a universal conception of ‘the’ language as such – its ‘inner form,’ of myth as such, of *the* knowledge of nature, *the* mathematics as such –” (ECN 1, pp. 163f.).

The “Philosophy of the Symbolic” itself, however, by no means adopts an objectivating perspective. The “immersion in the empirical material,” as the preceding quotation points out, by no means has as its goal the task of considering the symbolic in terms of its individual empirical specifications. Rather, the following chapter will demonstrate how Cassirer links the conditions of the symbolic and its specific forms with the history of culture, ultimately in order to comprehend them in light of the unfolding of the symbolic, and thus by reference to the realization of the potential, not merely of symbolizing reality in a variety

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<sup>7</sup> On ECW 12, p. 18, Cassirer reiterates this requirement: “Proof of this relationship [between the ‘reflection of a given existence’ and its ‘proper, typical mode of forming itself,’ A.S.] cannot, to be sure, be attempted from above, in a purely constructive construction [*konstruktivem Aufbau*], but rather must presuppose the facts of mythical consciousness, the empirical material of comparative mythology and comparative religion.”

of forms, but rather of simultaneously becoming aware of the symbolic character of these realities. Consequently, the symbolic is likewise part of cultural reality, even as, in its historical unfolding, it simultaneously opens up the possibility for comprehending reality in its symbolic character. Cassirer is thus, on the one hand, pursuing an anti-idealist theme when he links up with Kant's transformation of the transcendental and for that reason carries out the philosophy of culture by constantly taking into account the empirical discoveries of the cultural sciences. On the other hand, however, he is thereby seeking to accentuate a peculiar *telos* or inherent norm of the symbolic and its unfolding, one that, in the form of a self-conscious insight into the symbolic activity of the human being in representing his reality, is entirely bound up with themes from German Idealism. Cassirer's philosophy of culture thus operates in close proximity to the cultural sciences and is rooted essentially in their empirical findings, although it does not accept their objectivating viewpoint, but rather expands that viewpoint to include an awareness of the normative aspects of culture.

Cassirer links the highlighted provisions of the symbolic chiefly with the concept of the genesis, whose systematic significance and operative dimension in Cassirer's writings has already been pointed out early on by Ernst Wolfgang Orth.<sup>8</sup> The present chapter will now demonstrate, with the help of the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," how Cassirer essentially develops the concept in engagement with the linguistic research of Wilhelm Wundt and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Namely, it is not merely that Cassirer first engages with a specific form of symbolization beyond knowledge with the help of these two authors and thus intertwines the particularizations of the symbolic with the historical reality of language and languages. It is also, for him, a matter of investigating the potential of languages, not merely to symbolize the world in a manner peculiar to each, but also to give insight into how linguistic structures determine the symbolized world concretely. For Cassirer, the genesis of language thus has as its standard simultaneously the unfolding of linguistic structures and insight into the specific linguistic-symbolic genesis of the world. It is therefore closely linked with Cassirer's older theory of the scientific concept, which now has its basis in language and its prehistory in the unfolding thereof.

Cassirer, however, neither focuses this view of the genesis of the symbolic into a clearly defined concept nor explicates it in the form of a purely philosophical argument. Rather, he develops it in engagement with the linguistic research of Humboldt and Wundt, referring to their empirical discoveries and discussing their methodological approaches and theoretical interpretations. In the follow-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Orth (1988, pp. 57–59).

ing pages, therefore, we can pursue by way of example how Cassirer appropriates the research of the cultural sciences and simultaneously crystallizes his philosophical reflection and terminology. The philosophical justification for why Cassirer's philosophy of culture is based on the empiricism of the cultural sciences will thus simultaneously be supplemented by a detailed look at the concrete praxis of Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences.

## The Objective Spirit Objectivated: Cassirer's Reception of the Cultural Sciences

The reader of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is familiar with Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences of his day solely in terms of its results. Already in the first volume, Cassirer displays, with considerable enthusiasm and perseverance, a comprehensive knowledge of the diversity of languages and their structures, of linguistic schematizations of space and time, of words for number and ways of representing the ego, and he does not fail to cite the relevant literature in the cultural sciences extensively. What is laid out here in impressive abundance, certainly, must first have been received, collected, ordered, and interpreted philosophically. How great a challenge was represented by this engagement with a variety of cultural sciences and the phenomena that they investigate will become clear with a glance at the preface to the first volume.

There, Cassirer describes the practical challenges of his work quite candidly: "Of course, this wealth of material or empirical scientific research places philosophical contemplation before an insuperable difficulty. For it can no more disregard these details than it can wholly submit to them and still remain entirely faithful to its own intention and task" (*ECW* 11, p. X). Thus, on this totally pragmatic level, Cassirer confronted the task of finding a link between the multitude of empirical observations and philosophical questions, one which neither sacrifices the fullness of detail to a conceptual construction nor loses track of the more universal questions of philosophical reflection. It already required the utmost effort to obtain even an overview of the diversity of linguistic phenomena and the academic literature on the subject: "It had to attempt to secure the broadest possible overview, not only of the phenomena of a single linguistic sphere, but of various linguistic spheres that differed in structure and were widely divergent from each other in their basic mode of thinking. The scope of the literature in linguistic sciences that had to be consulted in the working out of these problems became so vast that the goal initially set out for this investigation receded further and further into the distance, so that I asked myself whether or not this goal was at all attainable for me" (*ECW* 11, p. X). Several lines later, in an

unusually personal tone, Cassirer even relates that, in “working on this book, I myself have become keenly aware of the difficulty of the subject matter and the limits of my own powers” (*ECW* 11, p. X). The attentive reader can perhaps understand this experience better if we can believe Cassirer's account of a lucky escape: “If I have, nevertheless, continued along this trodden path, it is because the more the manifold of linguistic phenomena opened up before me, the clearer I believed to perceive the individual details that mutually illuminate each other and how, as it were, they inserted themselves into a general interconnection. The following investigations are directed at the consideration of the development and elucidation of this interconnection and not with any isolated instances” (*ECW* 11, p. X). However we might evaluate Cassirer's claim that the details of linguistic research, as it were, form on their own a unified whole – without a great deal of paperwork towards the goal of receiving and collecting, ordering and interpreting the material of the cultural sciences, this impression could hardly have arisen at all.

The records that Cassirer produces following the *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” from the summer of 1917 thus reflect the challenges that he faced both practically and methodologically in his engagement with linguistic research. Cassirer assembles a collection of working notes that may have already encompassed in the summer of 1918 the 241 sheets that can still be reconstructed almost completely today.<sup>9</sup> They apparently serve as the foundation for the outline for a chapter concerning language from the summer of 1919, but they are also worth a look on their own terms, quite apart from that fact: they do not merely allow for concrete and detailed insights into Cassirer's reception of the cultural sciences and its interplay with reflection on the philosophy of culture, but also highlight the practical possibilities and epistemic resources that the simple notes on paper concerning the philosophy of culture place into our hands.

The 240 sheets that emerge following the *Disposition* for the project do not follow any pre-established method, but rather constantly make use of the specific properties of a collection of loose sheets, which in particular can adapt to changing problems over the course of the work. Their unity and order is secured first of all by the numeration that makes it possible to identify each individual sheet in this loose collection. This order is purely formal and does not presuppose any systematic ordering of contents, which perhaps seems particularly suit-

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<sup>9</sup> On the discovery from the archive, as well as the questions surrounding the work's date, cf. once again the section “The Discovery” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 29–40 above.

able for this first, exploratory research. It simultaneously allows for references to be made to the sheet numbers in order to establish connections in terms of content, and ideally it allows us to get a view of the systematic links. What is significant in this context is the fact that the numerical order overlaps with considerations of content, because Cassirer usually, in the titles and subtitles, identifies the scientific object<sup>10</sup> or mentions the bibliographic information of the text<sup>11</sup> to which the notes are devoted. Through this numerical identification, their association with an author or text, as well as their thematic categorization, the sheets make it possible to work through the literature in the cultural sciences, and so they should simultaneously develop a systematic order that can serve as the basis for philosophical reflection. The margin, which Cassirer marks more by touch than by sight via folding and which he kept clear of writing on the first pass, plays a non-negligible role in this context, because it supplies a place for further elaboration and makes possible additions that augment the available knowledge, refer to other sheets, or note necessary revisions.<sup>12</sup> The empty margin seems, as it were, to preserve the future as a resource.

The numerical ordering of the sheets does not, as such, give any indication of their chronological development, especially because the numerals, unlike the notes, were usually written with a colored pencil and were therefore possibly

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**10** Mentioned here only as an example, to which I will return: Sheet 46, with the title “Language, On the question of roots,” which is dedicated to a passage from Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology*.

**11** Again, an example from the sheets discussed later: Sheet 44, with the title “Language, Sütterlin, the Essence of Linguistic Structure. Critical remarks on Wilhelm Wundt’s linguistic psychology, Heidelberg 1902.”

**12** An example can already be found on the first page of Sheet 1. Where Cassirer had noted – a point to which I will return later – that, according to Wundt, the “indicative gesture” is “nothing other than the grasping movement reduced to an indication,” he adds in the margin a similar formulation that apparently attracted his attention in his research: “Thus also Jäger (Steinthal, *Origin*, p. 231). Pointing with the hand ‘is nothing other than a clutching into the distance’ (q.v.)” Cassirer is referring here to Steinthal (1888), who in the quoted passage makes reference in turn to a formulation by the zoologist Gustav Jäger; cf. Jäger (1867, p. 1048). This formulation matched up all too well with Cassirer’s connection to Wundt’s theory of the gesture, and so he added it to his records. In this way, it even managed to make it into the published text of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: “Even among the most highly developed animals, ‘clutching into the distance,’ as pointing with the hand has been called, has never gone beyond the first, incomplete beginnings” (ECW 11, p. 126). The margin thus permitted an accumulation of the fruits of Cassirer’s reading, one that is ultimately present all at once in the published text. Admittedly, it is present there without leaving any trace of the working process, because Cassirer does not merely forgo mentioning the originator of the formulation, he also leaves out the mediating work of Steinthal, which to my knowledge is also not quoted in any of his other texts.

added later. Extended study of the records nevertheless gives the impression that the work does progress as the numbers increase, though that must ultimately remain a speculative interpretation. The titles of the records on language give greater and greater priority to the phenomena referenced by the now mostly shorter sheets, and they noticeably converge on a system of keywords indicating an ordering of the phenomena, at least to some degree.<sup>13</sup> The records seem to advance from what are rather obviously overviews towards becoming technical literature in a stricter sense, dedicated to sophisticated, individual special phenomena. Thereby, the records come across as increasingly well informed, such that it apparently became feasible to label the theme in the title more precisely, to situate the position of the author within the technical discussion, to record the interesting material in a few lines, and to establish links via possible references to other sheets. In the course of intensive research into the literature, at least in the case of language, there actually seems to have taken shape a systematic ordering of phenomena. This ordering ultimately attained the upper hand, because Cassirer dismissed the numerical ordering of the sheets and filed them in part – where necessary by the addition of keywords at the margin – among the new records, which are ordered solely by their headings.

What stands out in this context from these records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” are the efforts towards a systematic conception of the project as well as their connection to Cassirer’s reception of the knowledge of the cultural sciences. The areas of emphasis in Cassirer’s work thereby undergo an apparent shift, as documented in the various forms of the records. If we keep to Cassirer’s numerical ordering, we discover that approximately the first forty or fifty sheets usually represent more comprehensive outlines and develop one notion or one perspective over the course of several pages. We are thereby dealing at the beginning primarily with conceptual perspectives, in which context Cassirer is particularly working out the genetic dimension of the conditions of the symbolic and their specification into concrete forms of symbolization. Increasingly, however, the records also deal with basic systematic questions of the cultural sciences and the task of working through their rich material. At first, the references to the literature are still classified according to the independent development of the notion in question. Only when we get to the sheets with higher numbers, in contrast, do excerpts that often identify even in the title much more specific questions taken from the material of the cultural sciences begin to prevail, excerpts which immediately cite bibliographical information and which ultimately

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**13** For a first impression, cf. the list of sheets and their titles in the appendix, pp. 369–378 below.

make note of several key points and page references. These sheets, in contrast to the first group, are only rarely longer than one or two pages, and they are dedicated less to the conceptual development of the project or the ordering of the material of the cultural sciences than to the task of recording a reference or a quotation from the research literature for later use.

Just how much of a challenge it is to put together an overview of the knowledge contained in the cultural sciences without losing track of the relevant details, and simultaneously to promote philosophical reflection and conceptualization, becomes quite obvious primarily by study of the earlier records. On the one hand, profound knowledge of the specific phenomena has to be compiled and, on the other, philosophical concepts must be refined in the context of the knowledge contained in the cultural sciences. Beyond that, however, Cassirer is also striving towards basic concepts that first and foremost make it possible to comprehend those phenomena in the larger context of culture and simultaneously in terms of the specificity appropriate to each. What we are dealing with, therefore, is a “circle,” insofar as our understanding and interpretation of the relevant cultural phenomena depend in turn on those concepts. Certainly, this circle does not operate in the logical sphere, and it therefore does not indicate a fallacy. It characterizes a process of reflection in which concepts and phenomena are reciprocally related to one another, and precisely via this mutual processing they can be identified more clearly and understood more precisely. Such a “circle” describes nothing other than the productivity of a philosophizing that remains close to the material – as well as genuinely empirical forms of knowledge that have to arrange their concepts in accordance with the objects.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Cassirer’s “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” the universal and the particular are reciprocally related to one another in this circle – quite in keeping with the task of the reflecting judgment according to Kant. The result is a sort of back-and-forth, because philosophical reflection, on the one hand, begins with the particular in order to rise up to the universal, and on the other hand it assumes a universal as that of which the particular should be understood as a specification. Philosophical reflection thus attempts to interpret the phenomena by reading off from them their possible universal conditions and by putting these conditions to the test via specifying them for the phenomena and verifying them in that context.

Thus, in this process, philosophical concept-formation and empirical material are reciprocally related to one another, and so the task of interpreting the

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<sup>14</sup> On this point, cf. the section “The Empirical Transformation of the Transcendental” in the second chapter of the present study, pp. 165–171 above.



knowledge of the cultural sciences and that of testing concepts in the context of phenomena go hand in hand. This close connection to the “empirical material” taken from research in the cultural sciences has wide-ranging consequences for the self-understanding of Cassirer’s philosophy and for the status of its terminology. The reason is that any conceptual reflection on conditions that only unfold and become differentiated in cultural phenomena can only be provisional and will therefore have to maintain a certain openness. Furthermore, it will have to engage with the fact that the task of identifying the sought-after conditions, but also the appropriate philosophical terminology, depends essentially on the material of the cultural sciences. There is, therefore, a good reason for why Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic does not attempt to define its basic concepts right at the beginning and why even later it does not primarily devote itself to the task of clarifying them.

This idiosyncrasy of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture has been given various, not entirely contradictory justifications. We may be dealing with a specific characteristic of Cassirer’s “style” that accompanies his understanding of symbolic formation, as Barbara Naumann has suggested.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, we might also, like Oswald Schwemmer, refer with good reason to Cassirer’s holistic theory of the relational concept in order to view the “precision” of Cassirer’s use of the concept as located – instead of in his rare explicit definitions – in the intertwining of the whole with individual concepts that are often simultaneously formulaic and varied.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, it could be argued that the definition of philosophical concepts cannot stand at the beginning because they depend on the train of thought and the unfolding of the argumentation, a point which Kant already regarded as a characteristic of philosophy and which Cassirer, in turn, understands as a peculiarity of Kantian philosophizing.<sup>17</sup> A significant and hitherto widely neglected reason, in contrast, comes to the fore only by reference to Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of culture. His concepts are supposed to encompass a variety of cultural phenomena, whose particularization, order, and structure only become accessible by way of the comprehensive research of the cultural sciences. As such, however, these concepts and their definition neither can nor may stand either at the beginning or at the center of this philosophical project. They must be developed and justified in terms of a careful perusal of the research of the cultural sciences, and they must also be accounted for in the context of the diversity of cultural phenomena. Determination of concepts in the philosophy of

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15 Cf. Naumann (1998, pp. 21–54).

16 Cf. Schwemmer (1997, pp. 12f.).

17 Cf. *CPR*, A 726–731/B 754–759, and Cassirer (1981, pp. 141–144).

culture, engagement with the cultural sciences, and work on cultural phenomena are here reciprocally related to one another, and they thereby take aim at a conflict situation between universal and specific conditions that render comprehensible a variety of cultural phenomena, both in terms of their particularization for each case and in terms of their overarching order.

Finally, with an eye to Cassirer's engagement with the research of the cultural sciences, we should not ignore the fact that Cassirer is dealing with a body of knowledge that requires interpretation in order to become compatible with philosophical reflection at all.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, such interpretation is always already an integral moment of empirical research and the accompanying methodological debates. The philosopher, however, finds in the cultural sciences even fewer unshakeable conclusions. In quite practical terms, he primarily encounters scientific questions and assertions that are just as convoluted as they are controversial, and he becomes involved in discussions in which empirical knowledge, methodological disputes, and speculative theses are often hard to separate. The productive process of reception should therefore never be neglected, since a point of connection needs to be chosen and a stand needs to be taken wherever interpretations are unavoidable. The philosophical reception of the cultural sciences should therefore always be understood by taking into consideration the interpretations that it inevitably makes, but which it does not necessarily disclose.

Naturally, such a premise represents no insignificant difficulty for understanding Cassirer's engagement with the cultural sciences and his records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." Nevertheless, it is indispensable for the task of doing justice to the complexity of philosophical reception. And in Cassirer's case in particular, it is essential for doing justice to a stylistic and intellectual idiosyncrasy that characterizes both Cassirer's published texts as well as his working notes. As should already have become clear in the last chapter with the help of the interpretation of Kant, and as was also emphasized in various ways and worked out in part via examples from the secondary literature, Cassirer mostly develops his argumentation in engagement with authors who were familiar to him, and in so doing he often allows his own position and that of the other author to blend into one another.<sup>19</sup> In Cassirer's use of quotations, paraphrase,

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**18** Accordingly, Cassirer's hope that we may be able "to formulate the *questions* that were addressed in linguistics with systematic generality, but in each case to extract the *answers* to these questions from the empirical research itself" might also turn out to be questionable (*ECW* 11, p. X).

**19** Admittedly, this idiosyncrasy of Cassirer has been taken up as the object of systematic discussion or detailed exegesis far more rarely than it might have deserved. Important hints have already been provided by Orth (1988, pp. 45–74). Beyond that, on the example of the recourse to

and concepts, therefore, reconstruction, adaptation, and appropriation can usually only be distinguished with difficulty, particularly since he refers in this context to authors and texts whose interpretation is usually controversial. Discussion of Cassirer's records must therefore take into account the fact that they do not merely integrate historical and systematic levels of philosophy, as well as philosophical concepts, with the material of the cultural sciences, but also that the reception of works in the cultural sciences necessarily implies their philosophical interpretation.

It by no means, however, follows from the fact that research in the cultural sciences must inevitably be interpreted that philosophy can have free rein over the knowledge of the cultural sciences.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Cassirer's reading of the linguistic research of Wundt and Humboldt will demonstrate how that reading does not merely pick and choose from the material of the cultural sciences and establish priorities among the observed phenomena, but also occasionally ignores findings and pieces of evidence. Ultimately, however, another aspect will emerge in greater clarity: in reception, reflection on the philosophy of culture engages with technical discussions that occasionally compel it, not merely to validate its own reading again and again, but also to put its philosophical desirability to the test and possibly to revise its own premises. Wherever it invokes the research of the cultural sciences, thus, reflection on the philosophy of culture must constantly also be ready to draw consequences for itself from the progress of the technical debates. Thus, via its engagement with the cultural sciences, it attains points of traction with empiricism, thereby giving rise to possibilities and imperatives for refining or correcting its own approaches and concepts. It does not by any means lose its autonomy as a result, because it can still itself determine the measure of its own argumentation.

After having sketched out the problem areas for a philosophical reception of the research of the cultural sciences as preparation, what follows will pursue the "path that leads through the *concrete* structure of spirit" that is of central significance for the development of Cassirer's understanding of the genesis of the sym-

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Goethe's concept of style in Cassirer's "The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Structure of the Human Sciences" ["Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften"], cf. Naumann (2004, pp. 78–87 and 90–92, as well as, for more detail on the role of style and its concept in Cassirer, 1998, pp. 21–54). Additionally, Naumann invokes Walter M. Solmitz' still worthwhile study by way of example; cf. Solmitz (1949).

**20** Heinz Paetzold's diagnosis that Cassirer renders the "research" of the "linguistic sciences of his day" ultimately "subservient to the philosophical concept" seems to me not to apply particularly well to his reading of Humboldt and the critical debates connected with him, or at least to be one-sided, as will become clear in the course of the chapter; cf. Paetzold (1994, p. 28).

bolic, and thereby for the project of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic”: Cassirer’s engagement with the linguistic research of Wilhelm Wundt and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

## The Genesis of the Symbolic: Wilhelm Wundt’s Theory of Gestures

The records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” contain a surprise right from the start. Namely, the first sheets begin with a researcher who has barely been taken into consideration by the secondary literature on Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic and culture, although he plays a not insignificant role in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Already in the foreword, Cassirer acknowledges Wilhelm “Wundt’s great work on language, in which for a long time he attempted to subject the totality of linguistic phenomena to a certain intellectual [*geistigen*] interpretation” (ECW 11, p. VIII). He is thereby referring to the first volume of Wundt’s comprehensive *Ethnic Psychology* [*Völkerpsychologie*], though not without indicating his critical attitude towards the “conviction” advocated in that text “that a philosophical foundation of language, if possible at all, would have to be achieved by means of *psychological* research” (ECW 11, p. VIII). When Cassirer, following the overview of “*The Problem of Language in the History of Philosophy*” in the first chapter, eventually turns towards his object directly, Wundt is once again close at hand. With an eye to “*Language in the Phase of Intuitive Expression*,” Cassirer does not merely invoke him as the key witness for a “*psychology of expressive movements*,” which Cassirer by no means gives a solely critical treatment.<sup>21</sup> He also calls on the “*psychological theory of gesture language*”<sup>22</sup> and discusses Wundt in the chapter on mimicking expressions in more detail than any other author, in which context he focuses on the emergence of language from the inhibition of activity and its transformation into gestures.<sup>23</sup> In the preface to the second volume of the *Phi-*

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ECW 11, p. 124, and the reference in the associated note.

<sup>22</sup> “*Gebärdensprache*.” While this term would ordinarily be translated by the English “sign language,” its scope in this context is broader than that term usually indicates (though it certainly includes full-fledged sign languages as well). For the sake of precision, I will use the term “gesture language” throughout, except in cases where developed sign languages are the primary object of discussion. -Trans.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. ECW 11, pp. 125–130. I am thus referring primarily to the first section of the chapter, which has often been dealt with in the secondary literature, but usually as divorced from Cassirer’s reception of the cultural sciences; by way of example, cf. Peter Müller (2010, pp. 25–28).

*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as well, Cassirer introduces – albeit without mentioning the name of Wundt – the approach of “general ethnic psychology” and acknowledges how it identifies the “source” of myth “from certain basic specific predispositions of ‘human nature,’” once again with critical overtones (*ECW* 11, p. X).<sup>24</sup> Even in the outline for the fourth volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer evidently does not manage to get through his critical discussion with anthropology without Wundt, who has to serve as the second example, following Darwin, for all “attempts to understand pure semantic content by allowing it to emerge from natural existence” (*ECW* 1, p. 38). In contrast, the “analysis of the individual symbolic forms,” as Cassirer maintains in retrospect concerning the volumes on language, myth, and knowledge, inquires “not into the *emergence* of these forms, but rather into their *existence* [*Bestand*]; it was governed, even in cases where it sought to analyze this existence itself, where it sought to isolate various ‘layers’ within that existence, not by a genetic-historical interest, but rather by a purely phenomenological interest” (*ECN* 1, p. 39). This discussion apparently aims at something fundamental, and it has its beginnings in the first records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” The name of Wilhelm Wundt is connected time and time again with the beginning of or prelude to the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” with the repeated warm-ups for the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, and with the question of the emergence, the genesis, and the existence of language, as well as of the symbolic as such. Because Cassirer’s first records on Wundt thus explore a variety of questions that hardly remain evident in the published texts, and in particular because they illuminate the genesis of the symbolic that Cassirer first approaches in his critique of Wundt, these few pages should be subjected to more detailed consideration.

In particular, the 44 written pages from Sheet 1 to Sheet 5 of the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” but also some subsequent sheets, are based almost exclusively on Wilhelm Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology*.<sup>25</sup> Between 1900 and

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Müller introduces all significant moments by way of gesture and vocalization, but, since he does not mention Wundt or make any reference to Humboldt’s theory of vocalization, he allows them to appear as Cassirer’s purely philosophical observation. In the second section of the chapter, Cassirer is already dealing with the limits of similarity in language theory and thereby with the transition to the analogical study of language; cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 133–146, in particular pp. 141f. **24** Once again, cf. similar passages with recourse to the “empirical concept of development” in ethnic psychology in *ECW* 12, p. 12.

**25** To be precise: Sheet 1: 13 pages, Sheet 2: 10 pages, Sheet 3: 4 pages, Sheet 4: 6 pages, and Sheet 5: 11 pages. For further records on Wundt, cf. by way of example the general characterization of myth on Sheet 22, as well as the notes on Wundt’s critique of the concept of roots on Sheet 56, to which I will return later.

1920, the 10 volumes of this work, which essentially dealt with culture in its entirety on a psychological foundation, appeared in rapid succession. In 1916, the six volumes on “Language,” “Art,” and “Myth and Religion” were already available in a second edition, which Cassirer also consulted.<sup>26</sup> The remaining four volumes on “Society,” “Law,” and “Culture and History” were first printed in 1917, 1918, and 1920, and are not mentioned by Cassirer. Throughout Sheets 1 to 5, Cassirer unfolds his own independent reflections, but he makes repeated reference to the first volume of Wundt's work, with the references usually following one another with increasing page numbers. On the margin, Cassirer frequently added references to corresponding passages in the subsequent volumes of Wundt's work. The impression thus arises that Cassirer outlined his approaches and ideas while perusing the volumes of Wundt's work. In this context, admittedly, he only refers to Wundt's comprehensive expositions quite selectively, and he makes more frequent note of references in only a few passages.

The fact that Cassirer relies on Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* in working on his project of a philosophy of the symbolic may, at first glance, be surprising. Today, Wundt is counted primarily as one of the most influential champions of experimental psychology, which developed out of philosophy and which advanced systematically and institutionally in competition with the traditional philosophers, who maintained that their questions were not answerable by experimental methods.<sup>27</sup> Thus, just a few years previously, the process of filling the chair of Cassirer's teacher Hermann Cohen at Marburg could become the occasion for an acrimonious dispute concerning the disciplinary status of psychology.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is hardly surprising that Cassirer is already making critical references to Wundt's famous thesis of the simultaneously parallel and independent development of psychological and physiological processes on the first page of the *Dis-*

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**26** Cassirer also cites this second edition of the first three parts of Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. I will therefore draw on this version and indicate the passages by way of the abbreviated titles, as well as provide information concerning the volume and sub-volume. In accordance with the systematic focus of the following discussions, moreover, I will limit myself to the first volume on language and its two sub-volumes.

**27** On this classical view of Wundt, cf. by way of example Robert W. Rieber and David K. Robinson (2001).

**28** On this context, cf. Mitchell G. Ash (1980, in particular pp. 406–409). Cassirer too had endorsed the “declaration” from 1913 that demanded that philosophical professorships not be awarded to psychologists working in a purely experimental manner. As Ash demonstrates, Wundt occupies an intermediate position in this dispute: he does not merely view psychology as part of philosophy; it is additionally supposed to include ethnic psychology, which is very much part of the human or cultural sciences, alongside experimental psychology; cf. Ash (1980, pp. 409–413, as well as, for supplementary purposes, 1998, pp. 22–27 and 42–50).

position.<sup>29</sup> Without mentioning Wundt, although he does so in later passages of the *Disposition*,<sup>30</sup> Cassirer observes: “critique of psycho-physical ‘parallelism.’ An incorrect question in this ‘parallelism’; suggests the view that there is first an inner, which subsequently and accidentally externalizes itself, comes to the surface –” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 1).<sup>31</sup> Consequently, Wundt’s psychology was completely unsuitable for conceiving of an expression that would have been able to satisfy the systematic demands of Cassirer’s approach to the philosophy of the symbolic. The reason is that Cassirer had understood the expression as being prior to any separation between inner and outer, and ultimately as a productive center of their correlative emergence.<sup>32</sup>

Apparently, however, the critique of Wundt’s experimental psychology by no means prevents Cassirer from relying on Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology* as he begins work on his new project of a philosophy of the symbolic. One possible reason could have been the fact that Wundt’s work, with its wealth of material, offers an overview of the fields of culture in which Cassirer too was beginning to take interest, and so he hoped quite pragmatically to obtain an overview of and point of access to the wider research despite all the systematic differences.<sup>33</sup> A second glance, however, reveals reasons that are more significant and substantial. That is, Wundt conceives of *Ethnic Psychology* as a complementary addition to the experimental psychology of the individual, which first means that it is devoted to the higher mental lived experiences that are dependent on the socialization of the individual and governed by a historical development all their own.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it does not deal with these lived experiences immediately, but rather begins with the “products of the whole human spirit”<sup>35</sup> or the “prod-

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29 For clarification of Wundt’s thesis of a psycho-physical parallelism, cf. Christina M. Schneider (1990, pp. 71–77).

30 Cf. *Disposition 1917*, p. 8.

31 Cf. also *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 10–14.

32 On this point, cf. the section “The Prelude to the Disposition: The Question of the ‘Existence of the Mental Itself’” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 40–44 above.

33 For an overview of Wundt’s treatment of the various fields of culture from a present-day perspective, cf. the relevant essays in the volume edited by Gerd Jüttemann (2006a, pp. 144 ff.).

34 On Wundt’s characterization of ethnic psychology, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 1–13 and 27–29). Wundt’s readership has long allowed this work to fade into the background and viewed him solely as a precursor to experimental psychology; concerning possible reasons for this fact, cf. Gerd Jüttemann (2006b), Wolfgang Mack (2006), and Berthold Oelze (1991, pp. 3–6). Oelze’s work gives a helpful overview of the texts by Wundt that are relevant to the development of the conception of *Ethnic Psychology*.

35 Wundt (1911, p. 32; cf. also pp. 24–26).

ucts of common culture”<sup>36</sup> and for this reason undergoes a decisive methodological transformation as compared with the experimental psychology of the individual. Namely, it is oriented, not on the experimental methods of the natural sciences, but rather on the approach of the human sciences in order, for example, to inquire into “how religion in the objective sense emerges, and what are the subjective moments to which its objective creations can be traced” (Wundt 1911, p. 115).<sup>37</sup> It thus consists essentially in the project of investigating “the laws that we encounter objectively in language, in myth, and in custom here in a psychological manner” (Wundt 1911, p. 67).<sup>38</sup> Thus, Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology* indeed aims at the laws of the mental life of socialized individuals, but it deals first and foremost with objectivations of human culture like language, myth, and religion, as well as custom.

In spite of all their differences with respect to the aspirations of psychology, therefore, Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology* and Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic turn out to be compatible. Of course, ethnic psychology pursues a different goal since it is ultimately supposed to work out psychological laws, but it demonstrates certain parallels in terms of its approach, at least when viewed from a distance. First, like Cassirer’s project of a philosophy of the symbolic, Wundt’s grasp of the fields of culture under consideration is characterized by a perspective grounded in the history of culture, and it incorporates the rich material of the cultural sciences, from linguistics, from ethnology, from the history of religion, etc.<sup>39</sup> He thus stands as part of the tradition of ethnic psychology in the 19th century alongside both its founders, Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal, who had already laid out the programmatic claim that “*ethnic psychology*

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**36** Wundt (1911, p. 65).

**37** On the role of “*spiritual products of universally valid value*,” cf. also Wundt (1904a, pp. 28 and 4). Georg Eckardt (1997, pp. 96–100) emphasizes this orientation on objectivations with a critical aim, because, on the one hand, such a situation obstructs the path towards “social psychology” and, on the other, the reconstruction of “mental functions” from existing “*objectivations*” raises methodological problems that are hardly tractable. These objections are the result of a psychological interest – and can, in contrast, simultaneously be classified as advantages by presupposing a perspective rooted in the history of culture.

**38** In more detail, cf. Wundt (1911, pp. 67f.): “Rather, it [ethnic psychology, A.S.] seeks to interpret the laws that emerge in the appearances of common life objectively on the foundation of certain universally valid psychic themes, which it extracts from the mental life of the individual, and the particular conditions under which these themes take effect at the various levels of culture.”

**39** For a critical view, cf. Oelze (1991, pp. 31f. and 152f.).



can only begin with the facts of ethnic life [*Thatsachen des Völkerlebens*]"<sup>40</sup> and must therefore be rooted in "materials" from disciplines like history, ethnology, and linguistics (Lazarus 2003, p. 8).<sup>41</sup> Wundt, like Cassirer, describes this collective and objective level of culture as "spirit" or "the spiritual" and thereby draws on early ethnic psychology and its independent adaptation of a Hegelian term that was also familiar to Cassirer.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, Wundt employs this approach in his tremendously rich ten-volume work, where the claim that he advances concerning the headship of psychology does indeed describe the intent of the text, but by no means always prevails throughout his rich illustrations. *Ethnic Psychology*, precisely because of its close connection to cultural objectivations and the material of the cultural sciences, occasionally resembles less a psychology in the conventional sense than – according to Wundt's formulation – a "psychology of culture"<sup>43</sup> or – according to a more recent reformulation – a "psychological theory of culture."<sup>44</sup> It does not reduce cultural objectivations to the

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**40** Lazarus (2003, pp. 7f.), reads in further detail: "In the same way, we will find in full measure the genuine materials that immediately make up the substance of the work in brilliant historians, ethnographers, and ethnologists. The same is offered by the works of Wilhelm von Humboldt on linguistics and, following him, by Steinthal's invaluable contributions – and, from a different perspective, by those of Grimm and his associates via etymological studies, as well as in Böckh, particularly via his characterization and history of the development of the Greek tribes. No less instructive are the works of Alexander von Humboldt, Ritter, et al. – All of these can, of course, present to us only the concrete appearances of the inner and outer life of peoples, whether individually or several at once, and thus the circumstances within which the spirits of those peoples [*Volksgeister*] manifest and the ways in which they unfold *historically*. To ethnic psychology now falls the task of finding among these concrete appearances, in a scientific manner and in a scientific form, the laws according to which they have been produced." Not least because of this empirical aspect, *Ethnic Psychology* was also classified as part of the "prehistory" of cultural science – cf. Hartmut Böhme, Peter Matussek, and Lothar Müller (2000, p. 39) – or cultural anthropology in the sense of Franz Boas; cf. Ivan Kalmar (1987, in particular pp. 671–679).

**41** On Wundt's work within the tradition of *Ethnic Psychology*, cf. as early as Julius Frankenberger (1914, pp. 156–160), as well as Karl Bühler (2000, p. 43). For more recent works, cf. Eckardt (1997) and the historical overview by Egbert Klautke (2013, in particular pp. 59 ff.).

**42** Cf. Wundt (1911, pp. 55–61). Cassirer's appeal to early ethnic psychology is less relevant, but has been retraced admirably by Gerald Hartung (2012, pp. 179–184).

**43** Cf. Günter Aschenbach (1988), with the quoted self-characterization by Wundt on p. 233. Unfortunately, the concept of culture and the reference to the facts of the cultural sciences remain quite indeterminate.

**44** I am taking up here a formulation by Christa Schneider, which unfortunately remains unjustified and therefore does not have any precise meaning; cf. Schneider (2008, p. 13). This label, however, provides a counterpoint to the long-anticipated and usually vain hope of being able to read Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* as a social psychology or sociology; cf. Oelze (1991) or Eckardt

individual, but rather relates them to the mental life of that individual in order to struggle towards apprehension of his higher accomplishments, which are dependent on society and its development. The parallel to Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic is apparent once we allow Wundt's rhetoric concerning science policy to fade into the background. Cassirer too begins with objectivated culture, with the aim of reflecting on the specific forms of the symbolic, and therefore of working out the historical, cultural, and collective conditions of subjective experience and its objects. Thus, Cassirer's outline for a philosophy of the symbolic does not contain merely a "Metaphysics of the Symbolic," but also a "Psychology of the Symbolic," because it considers both subjective and objective reality under the auspices of their symbolic mediation.

Naturally, these parallels should not lead to our neglecting the numerous differences, of which the most pertinent is the fact that Cassirer never detaches the mental itself, in its most fundamental processes, from the symbolic, while Wundt, on the basis of his experimental psychology of the individual, embraces a psycho-physical foundation of expression that is independent of the symbolic. Just thirty years later, this assumption – as Karl Bühler's critique demonstrates – seems outdated.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, according to Bühler, it hardly fits in with the approach of focusing on communal life and intersubjective interactions and comprehending them as conditions of higher psychological lived experiences and actions.<sup>46</sup> Presumably because of this assumption of a psycho-physical foundation, which Cassirer, like Bühler, criticizes with regard to the understanding of expression as a movement from the inner to the outer,<sup>47</sup> Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* was largely forgotten, at least in the context of the human and cultural sciences.

When the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" appropriate Wundt's observations and carry them forward productively, they are therefore drawing on other points, and primarily on the genesis of language and the symbolic. Wundt, in accordance with his naturalistic approach, conceives of this genesis from an evolutionary perspective on the development of humankind, which will run afoul of Cassirer's critique. Nevertheless, chiefly on Sheet 1, Cassirer will take

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(1997). Nevertheless, it must be stated that Wundt's own concept of culture, which is by no means central, is cut from a very simple and conventional cloth; by way of example, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 484–488).

45 Cf. Bühler (1933, pp. 131f. and 145–151).

46 Cf. Bühler (1933, pp. 130f.). This critique, in contrast to the one from 1927 (cf. Bühler 2000), may well appear to be a sympathetic distinction. In the earlier text, that is, Bühler had also, with a view to Wundt's conception of language, criticized the absence of any "reception" [*Kundnahme*] corresponding to the "exposition" [*Kundgabe*]; cf. Bühler (2000, pp. 50–53).

47 Cf. Bühler (1933, pp. 132–134).

up Wundt's observations concerning the emergence of language from gesture and simultaneously develop from this critical engagement a genetic perspective on the symbolic that reveals the systematic characteristics and central themes of his project of a philosophy of the symbolic.

The following discussion will therefore concentrate on the question of the genesis of the symbolic between Wundt's naturalism and Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic, and in that context it will predominantly be based on Sheet 1. Cassirer unfolds the genesis of the symbolic over the course of several steps by interrupting the headings several times with a dividing line and beginning again thereafter. He thus takes up, firstly, a remark by Wundt concerning the emergence of the "indicative gesture" from the inhibition of grasping in order to view that advancement as a first step in the development of the symbolic, which is supposed to lead up to the scientific concept. Secondly, he returns to a fundamental and universal definition to which both concept and gesture are supposed to correspond: namely, a detachment from what is immediately given and the attainment of space for reflection. Thirdly, this foundation is now explained in light of the development of the concept from the indicative gesture in order, fourthly, by recourse to Wundt's "imitative gesture," to describe the development of aesthetics from the gesture analogously and thereby to introduce the differentiation of the symbolic into various forms of symbolization. Fifthly and finally, Cassirer addresses the universal characteristics of symbolization. I will retrace this train of thought step by step and, in so doing, focus both on Cassirer's engagement with Wundt's theory of the gesture as well as his innovative conceptual decisions.

## Wundt's "Indicative Gesture": Natural Conditions of the Symbolic

The fact that Cassirer's notes on Wundt at the beginning of the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" have the character of a continuous text can already be seen in the title of Sheet 1. The two-line heading is set apart graphically and partially highlighted with an underscore. However, it carries over directly into a sentence that refers centrally to Wundt's conception of the "indicative gesture": "Concerning the progress from the 'sensory symbolic' to the 'conceptual symbolic' we can consult a remark by Wundt; *Ethnic Psychology* I, pp. 128 ff. explains that indicative expressive movements emerged originally from grasping movements, developed from them genetically. The indicative gesture is [']considered genetically nothing other than the grasping movement reduced to an indication'"

(Sheet 1, p. 1).<sup>48</sup> With this quotation from the end of the first chapter of the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology*, which Bühler too will cite with approval,<sup>49</sup> Cassirer is drawing on the genetic perspective of Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology*, and he consequently attempts to give a twist to the becoming of the symbolic in accordance with his own systematic concerns.

In fact, however, Cassirer hardly consults anything more than a "remark," because he disregards the overall context of Wundt's observations. It is not simply that Wundt introduces the "indicative gesture" after he has, over the course of the more than one hundred preceding pages, introduced a conception of expression that distinguishes the inner and the outer more clearly than Cassirer attempts to do following his *Disposition*.<sup>50</sup> He also took a critical stance against various attempts to characterize expression as symbolic.<sup>51</sup> Above all, however, Wundt understands expression, in accordance with his thesis of a psychophysical parallelism, as a simultaneously physical and mental movement, which he attempts to demonstrate with the help of emotions and the muscular movements employed in mimicry.<sup>52</sup> With an eye to gesture language, to which the second chapter is dedicated, he ultimately introduces, alongside mimicking movements, "pantomimic movements," which are first and foremost distinguished by the participation of different muscles, since they involve the "motion system of arms and hands" instead of facial muscles (Wundt 1904a, p. 126). From Wundt's perspective, the question of which muscles are involved is by no means without significance for the meaning of expressive movement. He had already argued, in the case of the mimicking expression, that the proximity to the sense organs determines which facial muscles are involved in the expression, and he likewise understands the specific characteristics of "pantomimic movements" by recourse to the muscles that are involved. Because the arms and the hands have first and foremost the function of grasping, Wundt concludes that they also serve to express our relationship to the "objects of the external

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**48** I have added the quotation marks at the beginning of the quotation by Wundt, which are not found in Cassirer's own writing; for the corresponding passage, cf. Wundt (1904a, p. 129).

**49** Cf. Bühler (1933, pp. 136f.).

**50** On the differentiation of various gestures, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 128–130), and on the concept of expression cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 37f.).

**51** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 85–88). He understands the concept of the symbol as an aesthetic category that masks the physiological aspect of expression.

**52** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 88–90); and on the difficulty of carrying over presuppositions from individual psychology into ethnic psychology, cf. in particular Siegfried Bushuven (1993, pp. 26–47 and, on gestures in Wundt's argumentation, pp. 48–57).

world that surrounds us" (Wundt 1904a, p. 129). The "remark" to which Cassirer refers takes place in this context.

Wundt's discussions apparently operate on the horizon of a concept of development that played a central role in the 19th century, one which was brought all the more into focus for a variety of discussions by Darwin, and which met equally often with consensus and with dissent.<sup>53</sup> Wundt thus describes *Ethnic Psychology* already in the subtitle as an "Investigation of the Evolutionary Laws of Language, Myth, and Custom" and refers in particular, as is hardly surprising, to Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* from 1872.<sup>54</sup> From a present-day perspective, his depiction frequently appears to be exuberantly naturalistic, and precisely for that reason speculative, when it apprehends the higher mental accomplishments in the context of evolutionary development, and in particular when it considers the expressive movement in terms of the transition from animal to human being. Human language proficiency is supposed to emerge from its natural conditions in the expressive behavior of animals, and thereby to undergo a gradual development: "Every level of this development is already contained as a seed in the previous one and is nevertheless something new with respect to it" (Wundt 1904a, p. 246).<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Wundt's understanding of development includes the possibility of something genuinely new emerging from given conditions. Simultaneously, however, it should be able to be explained from these conditions and must to that extent be contained in them. These requirements, which, even if they are not contradictory, are nevertheless in tension with one another, are probably supposed to be reconciled in the metaphor of the seed, which itself admittedly suggests rather

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53 On this point, with the help of "Neo-Kantian theory-formation between apriorism and developmental thought," cf. Klaus Christian Köhnke (1993, pp. 346–366) and, with a closer link to ethnic psychology and the problem of language, Hartung (2012, pp. 41–51, as well as, on the discussion following Darwin, 2003a).

54 On Darwin, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 78–85), and on the role of the notion of development in the conception of *Ethnic Psychology*, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 15–19). For clarification, cf. Eckardt (1997, pp. 86–90); Wolfgang Mack, Regina A. Kressley-Mba, and Monika Knopf (2006, in particular pp. 77 f.); as well as, on the way in which Wundt's concept of evolution was conditioned by biology, and in particular by Darwinism, Oelze (1991, pp. 19 f.) and Christa Schneider (2008, pp. 14–19).

55 I will once again put the quotation in context: "The fundamental law of all spiritual development, according to which the subsequent emerges entirely from the preceding and nevertheless appears to be a new creation in comparison, this law of 'mental resultants' or 'creative synthesis' is also proved little by little in the sequence of mental processes that make up the development of gesture language. Every level of this development is already contained as a seed in the previous one and is nevertheless something new with respect to it" (Wundt 1904a, p. 246). On the continuing development of language, cf. also Wundt (1904b, p. 635).

automatically that this naturalistic explanation of human language and culture from their natural conditions cannot get by without prejudging the object to be explained. It therefore runs the risk of implicitly positing a teleological assumption underlying the development under consideration and thus of infringing on its own claim of being able to explain the result from its conditions.

Cassirer's notes on Wundt take up this problematic situation. At first glance, this fact could give the impression that the conception of the symbolic had been, as it were, embedded in the perspective of a gradual development of language in Wundt's sense. If that were the case, Cassirer would immediately be singling out one "remark" by Wundt from the extensive and occasionally exhausting discussions of psycho-physical expressive movements because he views this point as meeting all the conditions that are supposed to characterize the symbolic in general and to open up its further independent development. Cassirer would thus be giving the symbolic a phylogenetic foundation instead of simply presupposing its operation as a necessary condition of culture – just as he had presupposed the concept in his epistemological writings. This impression, that the symbolic is here, as it were, assigned a place in the history of the human species, should not be rejected entirely and represents an added value, albeit a rather suggestive one, that should not be overlooked even for the corresponding passage in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, such a description is clearly applicable neither to the note that has been quoted nor to the published text, because Cassirer by no means allows the naturalistic framework of Wundt's claim concerning the evolution of gesture from inhibited grasping to go unquestioned. Rather, he refines his understanding of the genesis of the symbolic in the context of this critical engagement.

A first significant clue towards Cassirer's own view of the genesis of the symbolic is his proposed extrapolation of the emergence of gesture from inhibited grasping [*Greifen*] to comprehending [*Begreifen*]. The hardly surprising wordplay between *Greifen* and *Begreifen* may have been one reason why Cassirer singled out and wrote down this remark by Wundt: "The child grasps after all objects, wanting, as it were, to draw them immediately into its power; later results the 'indication' that merely points. If this is correct, then we can in fact say that one continuous scale leads from 'grasping' to 'comprehending,' a scale that is identified by gradation within the symbolic function" (Sheet 1, p. 1). In contrast, Wundt had pursued the genetic potential of the "indicative gesture" merely up to the "pointing motion" of the child and did not mention the role of comprehension at all (Wundt 1904a, p. 130). Cassirer, however, also extends this develop-

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 123–127.

ment to what is, for him, the decisive step: “‘Grasping’ becomes ‘pointing’: and in the same way ‘pointing’ [‘*Deuten*’] becomes ‘signifying’ [‘*Bedeuten*’]” (Sheet 1, p. 1).

These formulations seem merely to extend the development leading from the inhibition of grasping to the indicative gesture to the point of comprehension, but in fact they provide clues to the twist that Cassirer gives to the conception of development, instead of taking it from Wundt. In Wundt, we can first speak of a genesis of the indicative gesture from the inhibition of grasping in the sense of determining *from where* that gesture has emerged, such that, once again according to Cassirer's reformulation, “indicative expressive movements emerged originally from grasping movements, developed from them genetically.” However, it is not this development from presumably simpler and previously existing elements that captures Cassirer's interest. Rather, he rejects here such a form of “psychological genesis”<sup>57</sup> or “genetic ‘explanation,’”<sup>58</sup> just as he does in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, and he looks virtually in the opposite direction: instead of relating the development of the symbolic to that from which it emerged, he focuses on the potential for development that is given with the symbolic and will drive it beyond its first beginnings. Cassirer therefore does not, like Wundt, identify the “indicative gesture” with the “weakened grasping movement” from which it is supposed to have emerged by gradual evolution. He sees the whole potential of the symbolic laid bare in that gesture, a potential that is realized paradigmatically in the concept. Thus, what matters for Cassirer is not, like Wundt, primarily the prior natural conditions, but rather the further unfolding of the symbolic. As a result, however, he simultaneously carries out a radical alteration of the conception of the genesis that is of central significance for his project of a philosophy of the symbolic.

In conceptualizing the genesis, Cassirer is not, like Wundt, aiming at the explanation of culture from its natural conditions, but rather at the potential of the symbolic towards further unfolding, which is already given in its earliest beginnings. Nevertheless, this shift from a retrospective view of naturalistic explanation to a prospective view of the cultural unfolding of the symbolic, like several of Cassirer's other formulations, suggests that Cassirer understands the genesis of the symbolic as a teleological development, and in particular that he orients it on the scientific concept. Such a teleological perspective is already evident in the

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<sup>57</sup> As he writes with reference to Wundt in *ECW* 11, p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> I am taking up here a formulation that can first be found in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and which refers there to a physiological theory of sight; cf. *ECW* 13, p. 150. Wundt speaks of “genetic explanation” as a contrast to “careful description,” e.g., in Wundt (1904a, p. 126).

title of the first sheet, "Concerning the progress from the 'sensory symbolic' to the 'conceptual symbolic,'" and the concept appears to be the sole and predetermined goal of the development of the symbolic. All forms of symbolization that these pages do not discuss explicitly would consequently develop towards convergence on the *telos* of the scientific concept. Cassirer himself by no means shrinks away from the concept of teleology, which from a present-day perspective seems a bit captious. In the essay "Language and Myth. A Contribution to the Problem of Divine Names" ["Sprache und Mythos. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen"] from 1925, he thus speaks of a "'teleological' foreordination of linguistic concepts"<sup>59</sup> in order to emphasize a twofold argumentative movement: on the one hand, the theoretical concept that Cassirer had analyzed in *Substance and Function* has its foundation in the "stratum of linguistic concepts"<sup>60</sup> from which it could evolve; but on the other hand even the simplest "mythical and linguistic concepts"<sup>61</sup> already point beyond themselves towards the theoretical concept that they were ultimately determined to realize.

Such a simple teleological perspective by no means necessarily follows, however, from Cassirer's emphasis on the potential for the unfolding of the symbolic. Granted, the statements by Cassirer that have just been quoted, as well as the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," attest to the fact that the genesis of the symbolic is entirely bound up with a *telos* in which the scientific concept has an essential stake. That, however, by no means entails that this *telos* can simply be identified with the concept. Rather, there is some evidence against this all-too-simple interpretation. A first objection consists in the fact that an essential theme of and methodological guideline for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" is the unification of various forms under the concept of the symbolic, while nevertheless preserving the specific characteristics of its various particularizations.<sup>62</sup> It would fundamentally contradict this approach to fit the unfolding of the symbolic solely to the measure of the *telos* of the scientific concept. Moreover, Cassirer would run afoul of the accusation through which he attempted to distinguish himself from Hegel's system, namely that of ultimately sacrificing the diversity of symbolization to one unitary logic and the scientific concept. A second objection is less strident, but no less worthy of consideration. Many of Cassirer's formulations that apparently specify the scientific concept as the sole

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<sup>59</sup> *ECW* 16, pp. 227–311, here p. 263, n. 41.

<sup>60</sup> *ECW* 16, p. 253; cf. the whole passage in *ECW* 16, pp. 247–266.

<sup>61</sup> *ECW* 16, p. 256.

<sup>62</sup> On this point, cf. once again the section "The 'Metaphysics of the Symbolic': Philosophy of the Symbolic and Philosophy of Culture" in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 92–112 above.



*telos* of the unfolding of the symbolic are marked by a characteristic ambivalence in the language of the concept, which is grounded in the way that Cassirer conceives of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." As the first chapter has shown, Cassirer outlines this project by generalizing the concept into the symbolic, which then encompasses numerous other forms alongside the concept as possible specifications. On the basis of this line of thought, however, Cassirer by no means uses the concept solely to refer selectively to this concrete form of symbolization, but rather occasionally also to the paradigm of the symbolic and its accomplishments in general. Cassirer's language of "progress to the conceptual symbolic" thus raises the expectation that Cassirer is postulating a necessary teleological development of the symbolic towards the scientific concept. He can, however, also be using such language to describe only one possible unfolding of the symbolic that should be situated in the context of a whole spectrum of coequal alternatives, or to emphasize once again the fact that the potential of the symbolic is already present in its full extent in the simplest symbolizations and that it even encompasses the possibilities of its most highly developed forms.

As such, it does not necessarily follow from his shift away from Wundt's retrospective view, which reconstructs the development of culture from its prior natural conditions, that Cassirer is going back to the beginnings of the symbolic in order to assert its necessary future development towards the concept from a prognostic perspective. When he extends the development from the instinctive grasping of the animal to the indicative gesture and up to comprehension by human beings, he is not at all dealing primarily with the future development of the symbolic. Rather, what matters to him is the fact that, with the symbolic, something fundamentally new is emerging, and that the irreducible and extensive potential of its unfolding is already given in its first beginnings. Wundt's naturalistic "seed," which was supposed to reduce everything cultural to its natural conditions and thereby explain it in evolutionary terms thus becomes in Cassirer's notes the deployment of a new, independent potential of the symbolic: "the indicative gesture is simply the primitive seed of the symbolic function as such" (Sheet 1, p. 3).<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the genesis of the symbolic is acquainted with a *telos*, on the one hand, to the extent that the symbolic is supposed to be compre-

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**63** Cassirer himself seems to want to point out the significance of the metaphor of the seed already in Wundt when he takes it up in the preface to the second volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as well and characterizes the approach of "developmental psychology" and "general ethnic psychology" as follows: "Myth is considered as 'comprehended' if it is possible to render its source intelligible from certain basic specific predispositions of 'human nature' and to demonstrate the psychological rules that it follows in its unfolding from this original germ" (*ECW* 12, p. X).

hended first and foremost as the potential for its unfolding, but, on the other hand, it is not acquainted with any teleology in the sense that it is not meant to anticipate any determinate future development or even a necessary goal. The *telos* of the genesis of the symbolic does not assert any future development, but rather the potential for further unfolding that is present from the beginning.

We cannot yet count this thesis as having been proved sufficiently, but it is reinforced by Cassirer's further engagement with Wundt. As we have seen, Cassirer rejects Wundt's naturalistic aspiration to explain the emergence of the symbolic from its natural conditions. However, he by no means considers the symbolic as completely independent from or autonomous with respect to those natural conditions, a point which is of decisive significance for his view of the unfolding and the *telos* of the symbolic. The slogan "from 'grasping' to 'comprehending'" thus emphasizes, in a renewed proximity to Wundt, the continuity between two moments that nevertheless had to be distinguished from one another essentially. First, the distinction between grasping as "immediate 'grabbing' [*Fassen*]" through its "physical-material power" and indication as "mediated 'apprehending' [*Erfassen*]" ultimately refers to the emergence of the symbolic as such, and it also denotes the moment of anthropogenesis insofar as the indicative gesture represents a "privilege of the more highly developed intellectual human consciousness" (Sheet 1, p. 1).<sup>64</sup> Secondly, the transition from "mediated 'apprehending'" to the higher "'intellectual' conception [*Auffassung*]," in contrast, already presupposes the symbolic and describes its further unfolding on a cultural-historical horizon. Despite this essential difference between the emergence of the symbolic as such and its further unfolding, however, Cassirer seems to assume a unitary and continuous development "from 'grasping' to 'comprehending'": "From immediate 'grabbing' of the object itself (ἀπρὶξ τοῦν χερσῶν), the path leads through mediated 'apprehending' to the higher 'intellectual' conception" (Sheet 1, p. 1).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> I am quoting here somewhat imprecisely, since this formulation refers to the "so-called 'reflection'" that I will discuss later. This change of reference, however, is warranted by Cassirer's justification of this privilege by recourse to Wundt: "Wundt emphasizes (loc. cit., p. 130) that no animal, not even the ape, has advanced to 'indicative gestures' from grasping movements" (Sheet 1, p. 3). In "'Spirit' and 'Life' in Contemporary Philosophy" ["'Geist' und 'Leben' in der Philosophie der Gegenwart"] from 1930, Cassirer will distinguish the "sphere of grasping and action" of the animal from the "sphere of intuition and thought" of the human being more sharply (ECW 17, p. 200).

<sup>65</sup> The Greek quotation originates from Plato's *Theaetetus*, 155e, and is quoted in a quite similar manner in ECW 11, p. 126.

This emphasis on the continuity between the emergence of the symbolic and its continued development seems at first glance to be an imprecision in Cassirer's argument. On closer consideration, however, its point is that the symbolic can neither be explained from its natural conditions nor apprehended in complete independence from them. Cassirer does not begin with a discontinuity between the symbolic and nature in the sense that the symbolic would be completely autonomous by definition from the beginning, but rather views its genesis and unfolding in the context of its natural conditions. Accordingly, the symbolic is not a state that is attained with its emergence and would be guaranteed from that point onwards. Rather, it consists from the beginning in the potential for not allowing itself to be determined by the context of the natural conditions amidst which the human being and the symbolic stand. For Cassirer, what is at stake is the task of giving the symbolic a place in the life of the human being, one that by no means secures complete autonomy from its animal basis from the outset, but which opens up the new potential and the peculiar dimension that, in the unfolding of the symbolic, the human being is capable of detaching himself from his natural circumstances: "In fact: the 'indicative gesture' is simply the primitive seed of the symbolic function as such, and this implies the first form of dependence on material objectivity (of impulse and desire)" (Sheet 1, p. 3). The symbolic is never free from this "dependence," but it does open up the horizon of independence from material objectivity and thereby the *telos* of the genesis and unfolding of the symbolic. Cassirer thus carries out a shift in perspective with respect to Wundt, such that he no longer inquires into the original emergence of the symbolic from the natural conditions that preceded it, but rather takes into consideration its potential for continual unfolding and determines its *telos* by way of an "emancipation from sensory immediacy" (Sheet 1, p. 2).

Consequently, at the center of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic stands the symbolic alongside its natural conditions and chiefly its further unfolding in a continuing "emancipation" from these conditions. This interpretation is confirmed by Sheet 20, bearing the title: "Language. Onomatopoeia," where Cassirer addresses the relation of the "spontaneity of linguistic consciousness" to its "material precondition," which he here, by appealing to Wundt and by reference to "Steinthal's 'noise reflex,'" identifies as a "connection to expressive movements," ultimately in order to argue: "But that is not the formally constitutive ground [*Grund*] of language; it is only the soil [*Boden*] from which it grows in order to rise gradually to the level of freer activity" (Sheet 20, p. 5).<sup>66</sup> The differ-

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66 In more detail, the passage reads: "This spontaneity [of linguistic consciousness, A.S.] is ap-

ence between “soil” and “ground” relates the conditions of symbolization to the natural “material preconditions” on which they rest without reducing them to the latter. The symbolic cannot be explained naturalistically, but rather opens up a process of detachment from its “preconditions.” This continuing cultural process consists in the unfolding of the potential that is peculiar to the symbolic, and it incorporates consciousness without taking place solely in or through consciousness. Cassirer continues: “Here is proved the activity of the sign as such ... Consciousness of this activity is only the moment of birth of ‘spirit,’ of the ego as well as of language in its specific function of signification” (Sheet 20, pp. 5f.).<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the symbolic is embedded in the natural-sensory existence of the human being, and for that reason it particularly enables him to emancipate himself from sensory immediacy by means of the cultural unfolding of the potential peculiar to the symbolic.<sup>68</sup>

In the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer speaks of the “dialectical principle of progress” precisely in this sense: “the more language seems, in its unfolding, to be engulfed in the expression of the sensible, the more it becomes the means of the spiritual process of liberation from the sensible itself” (ECW 11, p. 185). This notion is characteristic of Cassirer’s approach to the philosophy of the symbolic and can be found in this or similar forms time and time again in his writings. However, in the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” and the three volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, he is not referring primarily to an anthropological question, a task to which Cassirer will only dedicate himself *in extenso* in later years.<sup>69</sup> Rather, in this context of the philosophy of culture, he primarily characterizes the function of the symbolic in general and the status of myth in particular. The reason is that “emancipation from sensory immediacy” now assumes the more concrete form of “working out from the

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preciated far too little by Wundt. To this extent, Marty’s objections against him are correct; even though we certainly concede and maintain the connection with expressive movements as a material precondition (Steinthal’s ‘noise reflex’). But that is not the formally constitutive ground of language; it is only the soil from which it arises in order to rise gradually to the level of freer activity” (Sheet 20, p. 5).

**67** Omitted is the reference: “cf. the implementation on Sheet XVII!”

**68** Consequently, I agree with Hartung (2012, p. 198): “For Cassirer, what matters is to banish the Darwinian notion of evolution in the medium of language. Linguistic development then means, not the simple continuation of processes in the organic world, but rather the increasing linguification of nature. Linguification is humanization – this is the thesis that has been advocated emphatically since Steinthal and which also stands at the center of Cassirer’s outlines.”

**69** On Cassirer’s anthropology, cf. first and foremost the authoritative primary text ECW 23, as well as the lectures on anthropology edited in the interim in ECN 6. The editor of the volume has also produced the authoritative study on the topic; cf. Hartung (2003b).

sphere of mythical immediacy" (*ECW* 12, p. XIII). Thus, taking the place of a natural sensory existence that is evoked by his engagement with Wundt is myth as the "mother soil"<sup>70</sup> of all forms, insofar as it contains its own overcoming within itself from the beginning, to the effect that "religion sinks one of its basic roots into the mother soil of *myth*" (*ECW* 18, p. 261).<sup>71</sup> The basic principles of the symbolic, however, remain unchanged despite these shifts: the symbolic cannot be reduced to its natural preconditions without being able to break away from them completely, such that it is constantly in a state of unfolding, and even in its simplest forms it contains the potential for the "self-liberation" of spirit from the sensory and its immediacy.<sup>72</sup>

## Determinations of the Symbolic in General: Reflection and Emancipation

As already suggested in the previous section, the anti-naturalistic point of Cassirer's engagement with Wundt blazes a trail for his understanding of the symbolic, but this point remains in need of further development. Cassirer builds on the continuity between nature and culture that Wundt embraces for the purpose of explaining culture from nature. Conversely, however, Cassirer allows the symbolic to enter into human nature in order to relate the cultural unfolding of the potential for symbolizations to the process of emancipation from natural circumstances from the outset: "'Grasping' becomes 'pointing': and in the same way 'pointing' becomes 'signifying.'" For just as, in the first case, we no longer bring the object into our physical-material power, but rather point to it, indicate it by way of the expressive movement, so do we further emancipate ourselves from merely pointing out the sensory object as something individual, something that we can perceive concretely, towards an increasingly advanced and abstractly

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<sup>70</sup> *ECW* 12, p. 1, as well as *ECW* 16, p. 266, and *ECW* 18, p. 261.

<sup>71</sup> Admittedly, this formulation is first found in Cassirer's essay "Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Judaism" ["Hermann Cohens Philosophie der Religion und ihr Verhältnis zum Judentum"] from 1933. In substance, though, it matches up with the earlier approach to myth; cf. the section "The Dialectic of Mythical Consciousness," in *ECW* 12, pp. 275–306, in particular pp. 275–280.

<sup>72</sup> It is extremely interesting that the figure of thought expounded here can be found in Cassirer's interpretation of the Renaissance and, more precisely, in his interpretation of the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa: "The human spirit – in this pregnant symbol is summarized, for Cusanus, the whole of this notion –, is a divine seed, which contains in its simple essence the totality of everything whatsoever that can be known; but in order for this seed to be able to unfold and bear fruit it must be buried in the soil of the senses" (*ECW* 14, p. 53).

mediated definition [albeit one that always requires sensory ‘signs’ as such]. The mere function of the ‘that there’ (τοδε τι) is increasingly superseded and purified symbolically: and thereby the particular, the ‘individual,’ becomes more and more the ‘universal.’ (the *eidos*)” (Sheet 1, pp. 1f.). The common moment that is supposed to encompass the inhibition of the grasping movement and the rise of the indicative gesture, but also further development leading to the scientific concept, is thus detachment from the givenness of the “sensory object as something individual, something that we can perceive concretely” in the context of the symbolic. This moment is essential for the conception of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic”: the relation between human being and world should not be apprehended by beginning with the givenness of individual things, but rather characterized by way of the symbolic contexts in which things are determined and experienced. This accomplishment of the symbolic is already supposed to be accomplished by Wundt’s “indicative gesture,” at least in a rudimentary form, but it contains a far greater potential and therefore finds its paradigm in the scientific concept.

We thus “emancipate” ourselves from the isolated givenness of individual things to the extent that we are successful at detaching ourselves from the individual object or impression and attaining insight into the nexus of its symbolic determination. Cassirer describes this movement as reflection: “This emancipation from sensory immediacy – both of the object and of the image – is the distinctive characteristic of all so-called ‘reflection’; and this in turn a privilege of the more highly developed intellectual human consciousness” (Sheet 1, pp. 2f.). With this notion of reflection, Cassirer is taking up a central theme from Herder’s famous “Treatise on the Origin of Language” from 1772, with which he had already dealt in *Freedom and Form*.<sup>73</sup> Reflection, however, is simultaneously connected to essential aspects of Kant’s Copernican turn, though its goal is not to consider the individual, presumably real objects as isolated givennesses, but rather to refer back to the processes in which they are determined and experienced. Unlike Kant, however, Cassirer no longer restricts this reflection to the faculties of consciousness. Rather, following in the footsteps of Herder, he allows it to return to the symbolic, since the determination of the objects as well as the possibility of this reflection and of reason in general are supposed

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Johann Gottfried Herder (2004, pp. 65–164), in particular the second section of the first part on pp. 81–97, where Herder usually prefers the synonym “awareness” [*Besonnenheit*] to the Latin “reflection” [*Reflexion*]. In addition, cf. *ECW* 16, pp. 115–118 and *ECW* 7, pp. 132–135. References to the theme of “awareness” or “reflection” in Herder are also found over and over again in the records. Herder is particularly prominent, however, at the end of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*; cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 299 f.

to rest on the accomplishments of symbolization: “‘Reflection,’ on the old view, is characteristic of ‘reason’: but here we see how reason is connected immediately and necessarily with the symbolic function” (Sheet 1, p. 4).<sup>74</sup> Reflection on the symbolic determination of the world thus involves consciousness, but is made possible by the symbolic and depends essentially on the unfolding thereof.

This emancipatory potential of the symbolic is developed further on a number of sheets. Sheet 128, “Concept of the Symbol (in General),” thus explains how reflection – which, admittedly, is not itself mentioned here – does not merely, with its turn away from immediate acceptance of the impression, make it possible to attain insight into the symbolic determination of objects, but also into the symbolic activity of the experiencing subject. At that point, the objects are no longer experienced as isolated “impressions,” but rather understood as the “expression” of symbolic activity: “At all levels of the symbolic, we find one continuous moment describing the whole development: the progress from passive ‘reception’ of the world to active world-formation, from the mere ‘impression’ of sense to symbolic ‘expression.’ We can study this law just as easily in the context of language as of myth, of religion, in the context of art, of science and philosophy! The initial ‘imitation’ of reality transforms into free ‘representation’ (cf. Sheet...)” (Sheet 128, p. 1). This movement thus brings about a different relation to the world by allowing the symbolic activity that is involved in every experience to come to the fore. It transforms the world that was given initially into the object and the product of a symbolization in which the subject has a stake. Cassirer characterizes this *telos* of the symbolic immediately thereafter as follows: “Thus, when we have passed through this whole development and when we have arrived at its highest level, the world, ‘reality’ as such, no longer presents itself to us at all as a sum of ‘impressions,’ as an ‘existing’ [*bestehendes*] whole, as a quiescent existence [*Dasein*] that we would have to ‘depict’ linguistically, mythically, aesthetically, logically – rather, that world becomes for us the systematic expression of an apex of spiritual energies, spiritual activities –” (Sheet 128, pp. 1 f.).<sup>75</sup> In the very same manner, Cassirer writes in the pro-

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74 Cassirer immediately continues: “(Too restrictive if this function, as usual, is limited to spoken language; this is only one of its expressions. ‘Reason’ and ‘language’ do not coincide entirely; rather, language is only one of its ‘symptoms’” (Sheet 1, p. 4). I will discuss the connection suggested here between reason, language, and vocality in detail below.

75 Cassirer explains further on the following page: “The ‘world’ has now, from the sum of mere impressions that it was at the start, become a whole, an ordered apex of spiritual ‘forms’ (expressions) that has been formed from within ... this is the highest development that is possible for us, – the transformation that we must carry out in order to ‘understand’ being. There is no other way to comprehend reality, to rise up to the level of the concept” (Sheet 128, p. 2).

grammatic introduction to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that the “one goal” of all of these forms is “to transform the passive world of mere *impressions*, in which spirit at first seems imprisoned, into a world of pure spiritual *expression*” (ECW 11, p. 10).

The transformation of the world from “mere impression” to “spiritual expression” is also often expressed by Cassirer in terms of the transition from “image” [*Bild*] to “formation” [*Bilden*], in which context he, as he so often does, interweaves diverse threads from throughout the history of philosophy.<sup>76</sup> The concept of the “image” describes at first the sensory givenness that represents the point of departure for its symbolic determination and idealization into a project of symbolization. I will once again cite Sheet 1: “This emancipation from sensory immediacy – both of the object and of the image – is the distinctive character of all so-called ‘reflection’” (Sheet 1, pp. 2f.). Cassirer also occasionally describes the symbolic transformation of the given “image” as its “overcoming” or even “annihilation.” Cassirer thus speaks quite generally on Sheet 8 of the “dialectic of the concept of the symbol: it lives from the image and annihilates the image!” (Sheet 8, 1, p. 2).<sup>77</sup> Through such and similar formulations, what becomes apparent first and foremost is the fact that Cassirer associates the concept of the image with the given individual intuition, and consequently that it stands in opposition to the active emphasis of symbolization. According to the model of the schematism chapter in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, “a purely spiritual function (‘schema’)”<sup>78</sup> is supposed to take the place of this given image, a function

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<sup>76</sup> The operative terminology of the image ultimately reaches as far back as does philosophy itself; for a first overview, cf. Johannes Grave and Arno Schubach (2010). For making me aware of the semantics of image, formation, and structure [*Bild*, *Bilden und Gebilde*] in Cassirer’s texts, I would like to thank first and foremost Gottfried Boehm, in particular for the section “The Return to Images” [“Die Wiederkehr der Bilder”] in Boehm (1995). I am invoking this text here as a representative of many of Gottfried Boehm’s texts that have instructed me in recent years.

<sup>77</sup> Cassirer also views this “dialectical” movement as unfolding paradigmatically in the development of myth and religion; cf. Sheet 75, p. 1, as well as ECW 12, pp. 275ff. Such a “dialectic” (Sheet 38, p. 5) or “antithetic of the symbolic function” (Sheet 38, p. 5, on the margin) can, however, similarly be understood as a universal characteristic of all forms of symbolization, because the genesis of the symbolic can by no means have as its goal the abandonment of symbolizations in favor of an immediate reality, but rather comprehends them as the means for a mediated symbolization; on this “self-liberation from signs” without the abandonment of signs, cf. Sheet 38, with the title “Concept of the Symbol (in General).”

<sup>78</sup> The formulation refers to the development of the theory of eidola and species to the point of “*assimilatio*” in Nicholas of Cusa: “The ‘image’ becomes more and more a purely spiritual function (‘schema’) for the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*” (Sheet 1, p. 9). Sheet 16, 2, p. 3 points in a similar direction: “It [the sign, A.S.] is in this sense identified with the expression, concentration: intensive fulfillment in extensive contraction. The more it loses as an image (intuitive con-



which Cassirer, borrowing from Fichte, also occasionally describes in active tones as “formation.”<sup>79</sup> The image is thus referred back to a “formation,” the “structure” of which it is ultimately supposed to turn out to be (Sheet 128, p. 2). It is this connection between “image,” “formation,” and “structure” that gives the “emancipation from sensory immediacy” a certain rhetorical plausibility and which will, in recourse to an idealist semantics, represent a guiding principle for the programmatic introduction to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>80</sup>

In spite of Cassirer's strict emphasis on the fact that symbolization has an “original-formative force, and not merely an imitative force,” however, we should constantly bear in mind that this process has its point of departure in something that is given through the senses and only subsequently and ideally transformed into a symbolically determined object (*ECW* 11, p. 7). As such, symbolization should only be understood as an emancipation from the sensory within the sensory, and its idealist features denote no more and no less than the *telos* of this process, which describes the dynamic of and potential for the symbolic transformation or representation of reality, but not an attainable condition. On Sheet 128, Cassirer thus maintains, in a reference to Kant's polemic against Plato's idealism: “The limit of what can be depicted objectively is pushed ever further: but it can never completely be set aside. The powers of spirit lay themselves bare and unfold only within this opposition. As such, we may not conceive of it as being

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tent), the more it attains in significance (semantic content, relational content).” The phrase “(intuitive content)” was added by Cassirer between the lines.

**79** In reference to the sign, Cassirer thus speaks of the fact that it never deals “with an impression [*Abdruck*] of the object per se (just as language is not one such) – but rather always only with a peculiarly [*red.*] view of a tendency towards ‘apperception’ this is fixed and maintained in the sign; so that, accordingly, objectivity appears in the sign always only as conditioned and mediated [*vermittelt*] by subjectivity. This free (infinite) activity itself becomes visible in the sign, not in the thing (in itself), but rather in the ‘image’ (in imagination) (cf. Fichte!)” (Sheet 23, p. 5). [The meaning of Cassirer's abbreviated phrase “*eigentüml. red. Auffassung*,” rendered here as “peculiarly [*red.*] view,” is unclear even in the original. -Trans.] For an abbreviated account of the semantic development from “image” to “formation” from Kant to Fichte and Cassirer, cf. also Schubach (2012b, pp. 76–81), as well as, for an informative account of the discussion concerning the concept of the image among Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi, Birgit Sandkaulen (2010).

**80** Cf. in particular *ECW* 11, pp. 18f., which is rife with references to “image-worlds,” “structures,” and “free formations,” to “fundamental laws of formation” and to the “original image-force” [*Bildkraft*]; however, cf. also – without any claim to being a complete list – *ECW* 11, pp. 21, 24f., 41, and 48f. Beyond that, cf. *ECW* 12, p. 18. In *ECN* 1, p. 256, Cassirer puts it similarly: “Only the action leads to the objectivation – only in free shaping, in *formation* does there emerge for the human being an ‘image’ of things.” Just how closely connected we ought to consider activity, object, and reflection to be, particularly in art, is shown on *ECN* 1, p. 258: “formation for the sake of formation reveals the inner lawfulness of the ‘structure.’”

annulled... The ‘light dove,’ etc.” (Sheet 128, p. 4). Kant had criticized Plato’s idealism because he, like the dove that, beginning in its “free flight” to believe that it “could do even better in airless space,” abandoned the “world of the senses” and thereby lost any “resistance” by which he “could stiffen himself, and to which he could apply his powers in order to get his understanding off the ground” (*CPR*, A 5/B 8f.). Cassirer appeals to this passage in order to emphasize that, for symbolization, the sensory, in the form of the given “image,” should not be understood solely as the necessary point of departure, but also as the inextricable and necessary “resistance” for the “formation” that seeks to transform everything that is given into a “structure” of its own making by means of the latter’s symbolic transformation and representation.

Cassirer’s formulations in the semantic field of “image” and “formation” are no more a standardized terminology in the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” than in the published texts, and they remain all the more uncertain since Cassirer also speaks of “image” in the field of aesthetics, understanding it there in a more specific sense. What initially stands out in this passage, however, is the fact that Cassirer’s “critical idealism” preserves the separation between the given “image” and the “structure” into which that image is subsequently and ideally “formed” by symbolization as an essential moment of the process of symbolization. Cassirer’s definition of the *telos* of the symbolic thus, even in terms of how he formulates it, apparently exhibits great affinity for the tradition of idealism to which Cassirer always felt that he belonged, and in particular to Hegel, to whom Cassirer refers yet again in this context.<sup>81</sup> However, he understands the given sensory thing, which is increasingly supposed to be understood as the result of symbolic activity, not merely as the point of departure for its symbolic transformation and idealization, but rather even as its “basis”: “And nevertheless, the image, the sensory moment, neither can nor should ever be eradicated completely, dissolved into the spiritual in the abstract ... for then even the spiritual itself would lose its genuine ‘basis’ – we are thus not dealing with an annihilation of the one moment, but rather with an unending process directed towards the spiritual” (Sheet 128, p. 4). The *telos* of symbolization does not denote a state, but rather the dynamic of a movement that should be understood as a symbolic process of elaboration and an unattain-

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**81** “The ‘recognition’ of the world as a structure of ‘spirit’ thus becomes the highest result. He has been successful: he lifted the veil of the goddess. But he saw, wonder of wonders, himself! In its own activity, the ego rediscovers the ‘essence’ of reality! (the ‘substance’ turns out to be a ‘subject’ (Hegel)!)” (Sheet 128, p. 2). Cf. similar references to Hegel in *ECW* 12, pp. XII f. and 251 f., and Cassirer’s more general commitment to idealism in *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 218–221.

able idealization of what is given by the senses; nevertheless, it may never dispense with the senses.

Cassirer thus understands the sensory simultaneously as a beginning and as a basis for its symbolic transformation, and as early as Sheet 1 he thereby promises to “sublate” the systematic opposition between sensationalism and rationalism: “In this continuous hierarchy from the simple ‘indicative’ and ‘imitative’ gesture to the pure forms of conceptual thought and ‘reflection as such’ we recognize, as an aside, the fact that the false dualism between ‘sensationalist’ and ‘rationalist’ epistemology is sublated in the universal logic of the symbolic. For one, namely, the idiosyncrasy of the symbolic function continues to have an effect even in the highest conceptual relations – but then ‘reason’ already has a share in the simplest sensory signs, indeed in the mere gesture of pointing” (Sheet 1, p. 10). Cassirer’s concept of the symbolic thus begins in principle with the truth of the “maxim of rationalism: that we only comprehend what we make” (Sheet 1, p. 8). However, firstly, this maxim does not imply any primacy of the concept, but rather characterizes every form of symbolization. Secondly, it thereby becomes evident that the symbolic genesis of the world has its place first and foremost in the sensory, from the apparently immediate givenness of which reflection is precisely supposed to allow it to become emancipated. Cassirer expresses it pointedly once again on the last page of Sheet 1: “We must recognize this creative element even in all the most primitive forms of reproduction: but even here it demonstrates a progressive development from the sensory up to the highest spheres of the ideal, the spiritual. Of course: were this autonomy not already present in every primitive ‘expression,’ then it also could not be manifest in the spiritual and the highest level of the spiritual” (Sheet 1, p. 13).

The fact that Cassirer does not simply level the difference between image and formation, between sensory givenness and its symbolic transformation, or abandon it in favor of a symbolic constructivism also proves to be significant because he also identifies in this manner the productive difference in which the conditions of symbolization are interwoven with the symbolization of phenomena. The continuous unfolding of the symbolic and the continued determination of phenomena are reciprocally conditioned by one another: the symbolic that is supposed to make the determination of the given possible in the first place does not function as a given presupposition, but rather unfolds within this process, ultimately in order, not to be determined by “sensory immediacy,” but rather to determine that immediacy in its own right. The autonomy of the symbolic is not given from the outset, but rather takes shape only to the extent that what is given by the senses is not merely accepted, but rather determined symbolically. Cassirer explains: “The problem of autonomy – although it is as such limited neither to ethics nor to logic, but rather presents itself in every spiritual form

whatsoever – it signifies in language, religion, myth, art, anytime and anywhere, an ever deeper collection, and thereby the ever more complete dominion that the specific law of form attains in all of them – This law of form is not recognized and known as such from the beginning – but to the extent that it is understood in greater depth, it too unfolds an efficaciousness that is increasingly powerful and pure – The whole can also be described as the transition from ‘image’ to ‘function’; as a progressive emancipation from the ‘image’” (Sheet 128, p. 3).<sup>82</sup> This reciprocal conditioning between symbolic “formation” and the initially given “images” holds particularly true in light of the realization of the potential of the symbolic for symbolic permeation of the world: the continuing unfolding and increasing autonomy of the symbolic, on the one hand, and the increasing transformation of the “image” into a symbolic “structure” and its progressive symbolic determination, on the other, go hand in hand.

From its basic determinations, the symbolic is primarily a becoming and only comes into being in the actual implementation of the symbolization of the world. In the course of its unfolding and its increasing autonomy, it grants to subjects some space for reflection, for “emancipation from sensory immediacy,” and for “free ‘representation’” of the world. As such, the concept of the symbolic should, in terms of its main conceptual features, have a basically ethical tone, which Cassirer admittedly never addresses explicitly and seldom addresses at all. On Sheet 17, “in general on the symbolic function,” he thus writes, with a merely questioning tone that is likely no accident: “We break away from the immediate pressure of ‘things’ by way of the ‘symbol,’ becoming ‘free’ – but in so doing are we now simply subordinating the ‘world of things’ to ourselves, dominating it [ethical moment of the symbol? there would also be for us no active ego, no self in distinction from material impressions without this mediation by the form of the symbolic]” (Sheet 17, p. 3). These lines are part of a whole series of passages that portray the symbolic transformation of the given simultaneously as a “liberation” of spirit and as a “domination” of the world.<sup>83</sup> To my knowledge, however, this is the only time Cassirer discusses the ethical in the records on the

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<sup>82</sup> On the “logical *autonomy* of the concept” that is first pioneered by way of language, but which is only achieved in science, cf. also *Manuscript 1919*, p. 200.

<sup>83</sup> Cassirer thus speaks of a “process of liberation” (Sheet 17, p. 4) and “spiritual self-liberation” (Sheet 18, p. 7), or of the “path towards ‘freedom’” (Sheet 20, p. 6), but also, on the other hand, of the sign as the “organ of the active domination of reality” (Sheet 17, p. 2) or of the “physical phonetic sound” as an “instrument with which we establish a world of objects spiritually, appropriate it, transform it into our world, expanding immeasurably the dominion of spirit, the sphere of the ego” (Sheet 34, pp. 3f.). This correlation between “self-liberation” and “domination of reality” appears to be quite problematic from a present-day perspective.

“Philosophy of the Symbolic.” This observation at least points in the direction of Birgit Recki’s analysis that Cassirer did not develop any independent ethics on the basis of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* precisely because his concept of culture has a fundamentally ethical dimension.<sup>84</sup>

## The Differentiation of Symbolic Reflection: Logic and Art, Concept and Form

Cassirer’s view of the genesis of the symbolic reverses Wundt’s naturalistic perspective on the emergence of culture from its natural conditions by emphasizing the potential for the unfolding of the symbolic and identifying it as an “emancipation from sensory immediacy.” Accordingly, Cassirer now, in the key points on Sheet 1, turns to the unfolding of the symbolic instead of retracing the connection between reflection and emancipation to its foundations. The unfolding of the symbolic, as will be demonstrated, includes differentiation into specific forms of symbolization, such that reflection and emancipation can also assume various forms by way of the symbolic.

On Sheet 1, Cassirer addresses aesthetics, which, according to the first chapter of the present study, provided an essential impulse for the revision of Cassirer’s philosophy.<sup>85</sup> The emancipatory moment of symbolization is not a characteristic of the concept alone, but also of “aesthetic ‘reflection’”: “This freedom of ‘observation’ in 2 main forms: in theoretical ‘reflection,’ which is mediated by the ‘concept,’ and in aesthetic ‘reflection,’ which persists in the ‘image,’ but which takes the image as a pure ‘simulacrum’ [*Scheinbild*], abandons its physical existence, and is to that extent ‘disinterested.’ We see here how these two meanings of reflection, which are heterogeneous in this way, are correlated with one another internally, and indeed through the medium of the symbolic function, which, as it were, splits into 2 different directions!” (Sheet 1, p. 3).

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Recki (1997, in particular pp. 72–75 and 78). Schwemmer (1997, pp. 127–195, in particular pp. 153–161) has demonstrated a possible path towards giving a more precise shape to Cassirer’s ethics by beginning with the concept of form. However, he too does not aim at an ethics in the sense of a doctrine of morals, but rather at the ethical dimension of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture; cf. Schwemmer (1997, pp. 172–177). A credit to this contribution is its having referenced the systematic significance of Cassirer’s “Axel Hägerström. A Study of Swedish Philosophy in the Present Day” [“Axel Hägerström. Eine Studie zur schwedischen Philosophie der Gegenwart”] from 1939; cf. *ECW* 21, pp. 1–116.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the section “The Impulse towards Systematic Expansion: Cassirer’s History of Aesthetics” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 59–64 above.



also identifies only one path for the “progress” of “emancipation” alongside others within one and the same horizon of the *telos* of the symbolic.<sup>87</sup>

Cassirer draws out this consequence more clearly than before on Sheet 4. Even in the title, which also contains an explicit reference, the sheet pertains to Sheet 1, but now apprehends its “progress towards a ‘conceptual symbolic’” more generally: “Concerning the progress of the symbolic from the simplest ‘sensory’ level to the highest ‘spiritual’ level (cf. Sheet I).” The language of the “spiritual” is apparently supposed to encompass the unfolding of the symbolic in both logical as well as aesthetic reflection and furthermore relies on the determinations of reflection in general from Sheet 1. There, the emancipatory moment of the symbolic was already characterized, in contrast to the particular given, by its “spirituality”: “What is essential lies in the capability of breaking free from what is purely related to the content of the impression, from its mere ‘existence’; this breaking free leads to consideration of the ‘form’ – (as a ‘relation’) and thereby to spirituality as such” (Sheet 1, p. 4). Consequently, the decisive criterion for the “highest spiritual” should not, either in the case of logic or that of aesthetics, accept anything given as an individual, but rather consider it in light of the relations that determine it. This relationality takes its model from the logical concept, but it can likewise be realized in the aesthetic “form” to the extent that it is considered in light of the relationships that determine it. There are several paths leading to the “highest ‘spiritual’ level” of the symbolic, to the “highest ‘spiritual’ expression both in the logical and in the aesthetic” (Sheet 2, p. 7). Therefore, it is important for Cassirer, on Sheet 4, “still to note that this progress by no means occurs in one single direction, such that it might have passed from the primitive levels to the more complex univocally and uniformly in the sense of a progressive ‘objectivation.’ Such a simple series cannot be formed” (Sheet 4, p. 1). Cassirer apparently understands “objectivation” here in the sense of the logical concept and scientific cognition, with the immediate aim of highlighting the expanded concept of objectivation that is constitutive for the project of the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” and which even includes equally every form of symbolization in general: “Indeed, all symbolic functions – beginning with language and up to logic and science, as well as the formative (aesthetic) function – are ‘objectivating’ to the extent that they imply a distancing from the mere material immediacy of the sensory impression. They are indeed ‘expressions’ of the immediate-

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**87** Later, Cassirer will also link the concept of culture with one of its own “tendencies towards enlightenment” in this manner, in which context he both joins forces with Cohen as regards the diversity of forms of emancipation, while simultaneously going beyond his triad of logic, aesthetics, and ethics, as explained by Renz (2002, pp. 161–221).

ly 'subjective' state and to that extent are configurations [*Gestaltungen*], 'formations' [*Formungen*] of it. But this configuration can move in a wide variety of directions" (Sheet 4, p. 1).<sup>88</sup> What stands out sharply and clearly here is the fact that the *telos* of the symbolic should, generally speaking, be identified as an emancipation from that which is immediately given by the senses, but that it can, on the basis of the differentiation of the specific forms of symbolization, be realized just as easily in the aesthetic form as in the scientific concept. As a result, we must begin in principle with the assumption that every symbolic form can specify the *telos* of the symbolic in its own way, a point, however, which Cassirer does not explain in detail, at least in the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic."

## The Genesis of Logic and Art: Wundt's "Indicative" and "Reproductive Gesture"

After Cassirer has differentiated the unfolding of the symbolic for logic and for art and sketched out the multifaceted character of its *telos* in logical and aesthetic reflection, he interrupts his considerations of Sheet 1 with a horizontal line dividing the text and subsequently takes up the genetic dimension anew. Because he had first taken up Wundt's deliberations on the emergence of the indicative gesture from the inhibition of grasping and located in this event the beginning of and potential for comprehending, it now seems that the obvious path is to inquire into the beginnings of aesthetic reflection as well. Preoccupied with Wundt specifically, Cassirer relies yet again on his theory of the gesture in order to differentiate the specification of the symbolic even in its very beginnings.

It is, however, quite typical of Cassirer that he first makes certain of what he has already accomplished before he dares to take the next step. In a few key points, therefore, he mentions once again the unfolding of the logical from the "indicative gesture," in which context the "graduation from grasping to pointing, from the latter to comprehending" is supposed to be confirmed, *inter alia* in the "twofold role of 'demonstration,' as sensory and logical, as 'pointing' [*Weisen*'] and 'demonstrating' [*Beweisen*']" (Sheet 1, p. 4).<sup>89</sup> Because even the highest de-

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<sup>88</sup> Two deletions by Cassirer were omitted from this quotation.

<sup>89</sup> In the subsequent sentence, Cassirer continues: "For demonstration is in fact nothing other than a thoroughly mediated 'pointing' that has developed to maximum purity and precision. It can be traced back to intuition (intuitive certainty), but is never a mere, but rather simply a symbolically mediated intuition. This holds true even for the logical forms of inference ... but in the utmost symbolic purity!" (Sheet 1, pp. 4f.).



velopments of the symbolic are not detached from their sensory beginnings, Cassirer now emphasizes once again that logical reflection too preserves elements of the “indication” of sensory phenomena from which it originated. Consequently, even the logical judgment contains traces of the “indicative gesture,” a point which Cassirer seeks to make plausible with the help of “impersonals” like the exclamation of “fire!” or the statement that “it is thundering.”<sup>90</sup> Interruption by a new horizontal line is required for Cassirer finally to approach the question of the specification of the genesis of the aesthetic, which he does by addressing a second type of gesture from Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology*: “Alongside the ‘indicative gesture,’ ‘imitative gestures’ are singled out by Wundt as a second class (pp. 155 ff.). This leads to the question: does a universal symbolo-logical meaning correspond to the imitative function as well, and what is this meaning? —” (Sheet 1, pp. 6 f.).

With the “imitative [*nachahmenden*] gesture,” Cassirer is once again singling out a central element from Wundt's theory of the gesture that presents him with abundant material. Wundt had introduced the “indicative movement,” which has hitherto been discussed in isolation, with an eye to gesture language and thus distinguished it immediately from the “imitative movement.” He takes up this distinction in the second chapter on gesture language, which Wundt understands as a sort of “ur-language.” The reason is that, in gesture language, “the relation between the sign and that which it designates [is] an immediately intuitive one,” a connection which is only loosened by historical tradition and transformation and ultimately shifted into a relationship of convention.<sup>91</sup> This immediately in-

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**90** “And now a second logical observation, which shows how that first meaning of indication, which is already contained in the indicative gesture, becomes apparent as a precursor of ‘comprehending’ even at the level of cultivated thought. In logic, the judgment, the basic form of which we tend to find in the judgment of subject and predicate: [S is P], is conventionally understood as an elementary characteristic of this ‘thought.’ But already here we can now see that difficulty for the traditional approach which is contained in the so-called ‘impersonals.’ (Extraordinary efforts have been made with respect to this problem; cf. Sigwart, *The Impersonals*) The impersonals, however, are nothing other than the logical expression of the originally demonstrative function that precedes the genuine function of judgment as the conjunction of subject and predicate. [It would be misleading to describe them, as occurs in many cases, as ‘denotative judgments.’ Fire! – i. e., not: this thing is called fire, falls under a concept; rather, it is the expression of the simple act of indication – In other impersonals (it is thundering, there is lightning [*es donnert, es blitzt!*]) this is more mediated; but always clearly recognizable” (Sheet 1, pp. 5 f.).

**91** The sentence reads as a whole: “This fact, however, if it has no other uses, can at least not be denied due to the fact that it demonstrates the necessity of the assumption of an ur-language in this psychological sense: the necessity, namely, that there must at one point have been, for every

tuitive relation embraces, on the one hand, the forms of indication and pointing, but on the other hand that of imitation.<sup>92</sup> Imitation thus develops out of indication and increasingly separates itself from the presence of the object that the indicative gesture presupposes. Gestures can develop that take more liberties with respect to their object, or which are of a purely conventional nature. Wundt speaks of "*representative [darstellenden] gestures*" that cannot be reduced to mere imitation (Wundt 1904a, p. 156). He specifies these in turn into "*reproductive*" [*nachbildende*"] and "*co-denotative*" [*mitbezeichnende*"] gestures, which are distinguished by the role of fantasy with respect to the object: in "reproduction," the focus is on the freedom of "restructuring," while in "co-denotation," however, the relationship to the object depends completely on fantasy.<sup>93</sup> As a third class, moreover, Wundt introduces "symbolic gestures," which are characterized by a shift between various "intuitive regions," from the temporal into the spatial or from the abstract into the sensory, and which are therefore of a purely conventional character (Wundt 1904a, pp. 156 f. and 174 f.).<sup>94</sup>

Cassirer's point of connection is once again decidedly selective. He is apparently just as little interested in Wundt's view of the symbolic, which can be called conventional, as in many other aspects of Wundt's discussion. In contrast, what matters to him first and foremost is the "imitative gesture," because it, alongside the indication that is supposed to lead to the logical concept, offers up a second beginning of the symbolic, which reveals within itself the potential for aesthetic reflection. The specification of the symbolic and the "splitting" of its reflection thus find their match in a twofold beginning. Cassirer's premise for this point of connection, however, must be the claim that "imitation" should

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type of naturally emerging language, a time in which the relation between the sign and that which it designates was an immediately intuitive one" (Wundt 1904a, p. 155).

**92** Wundt initially illustrates this imitation primarily by way of the imitative behavior of animals and children, which usually refers to the expression and acts of another; cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 130–133).

**93** "Among them [the representative gestures, A.S.], the reproductive gestures, as their name already suggests, stand closest to mere imitation, and they readily coincide with it in the simplest cases. However, on the whole we encounter reproduction even in these cases, as it were, at a higher level, since the restructurings that the object undergoes in the fantasy of the beholder before it is reproduced play a role in this context. Reproduction thus gives form to the image of an object more freely, in a manner similar to fine art with respect to merely imitative technique. In this relation, then, also lies the reason that the co-denotative gesture, in which the relation between the sign and its object first comes about via the assisting and complementary function of fantasy, separates itself from the reproductive gesture" (Wundt 1904a, p. 156).

**94** For a recapitulation of these distinctions from a genetic perspective, cf. also Wundt (1904a, pp. 222–226).

not be understood as passive depiction [*Abbilden*], but rather as active “reproduction” [*Nachbilden*]. Cassirer therefore shows himself to be receptive to Wundt’s separation of imitation from that which is present and from free “presentation” [*Darstellung*] in fantasy, but he ultimately comprehends them, unlike Wundt, as a condition of imitation as such: “What is initially important is to delineate the concept of reproduction itself more precisely. The fact that it is not simple and unambiguous is already established by the treatment of gesture language. There is a reference to this fact in Wundt himself. He distinguishes between simply imitative and representative gestures: and he emphasizes the fact that, in the latter, reproduction, as it were, [takes place] at a higher level, because the restructuring that the object undergoes in fantasy already plays a role in this context” (Sheet 1, p. 7). And Cassirer cites the sentence by Wundt that is central to this point: “Reproduction thus gives shape to the image of an object more freely, in a manner similar to fine art with respect to merely imitative technique” (Wundt 1904a, p. 156).

It is this space opened up by “reproduction” that enables Cassirer to link the “imitative gesture” with the genesis of the symbolic and to see in it the potential for aesthetic reflection from the very beginning. The reason is that “reproduction” now, in the aesthetic, proves itself to be an analogue of the symbolic determination of the given into the “structure” of symbolizing activity that represents the *telos* of the symbolic. Cassirer attempts to affirm this foundational assumption for his philosophy of the symbolic again for “reproduction,” contra the understanding of aesthetic “imitation” as mere “depiction”: “In fact, what this indicates is that even primitive imitation already implies an active movement. In imitation, our fantasy builds up an object or an act; it allows the latter to rise up before it, thereby making it clear, not merely in its being, but rather in its structure. In this sense, imitation is one form of ‘genetic thought’ or constructive fantasy” (Sheet 1, p. 7).

These lines are extraordinarily revealing in several respects. First, Cassirer, in contrast to aesthetic theories of imitation, is once again clearly identifying an essential feature of the symbolic: “imitation,” just like any symbolization, albeit in its own peculiar way, “builds up an object or an act; it allows the latter to rise up before it, thereby making it clear, not merely in its being, but rather in its structure.”<sup>95</sup> What has to be established in this case as a barrier against possible

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95 “This activist element of ‘imitation’ is the first thing that renders its further development – that development which is lacking in animals – understandable! (on this point, cf. the good explanation by Wundt, *Ethnic Psychology*, I, 229 ff.: imitation is rather a ‘sketch’; outline as ‘allegation’ [*Entwurf als ‘Vorwurf’*]; herein already lies the beginning of visual art! (231))” (Sheet 1, p. 12).

misunderstandings is considered by Cassirer to be part of the logical concept by itself. The symbolic, generally speaking, has a productive character, and therefore "imitation" is only "one form of 'genetic thought' or constructive fantasy."<sup>96</sup> Secondly, this aspect is emphasized by the fact that Cassirer understands both the "indicative" and the "reproductive gesture" as basic acts of an active and constitutive "apperception." As such, he is once again relying on one of Wundt's keywords,<sup>97</sup> not on its psychological definition, but rather on the idealist tradition running from Plato, through Leibniz, and up to Kant: "any such 'gesture' implies a basic apperceptive act of unification and differentiation" (Sheet 1, p. 10).<sup>98</sup> Through this reinterpretation of apperception, the imitative gesture, as previously in the case of the indicative gesture, is no longer explained naturalistically by going back to a psychological faculty, but rather situated within the horizon of the cultural unfolding of the immanent potential of the symbolic. Thirdly, all of Cassirer's sketches of the "logical and ... metaphysical branches of this simple problem of imitation" thus point in the direction of his critical idealism. As in the theory of perception running from the Aristotelian *eidolon*, through the medieval species, and up to the "purely spiritual function ('schema')" in Kant, or in the "problem of description" of "natural processes" in the natural sciences, "in aesthetics" too "the difficulties of the concept of imitation (μίμησις) from Aristotle to Batteux" are ultimately supposed to converge on the insight that we have to be dealing with an active movement of construction and formation: "Here too a solution in the positively formative function of so-called imitation itself." The constructive character is thus emphasized even in imitation and can gradually increase in the progressive unfolding of its symbolic potential: "This moment grows ever more towards the free forms of 'reproduction.' It waxes ever further

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<sup>96</sup> In the case of knowledge, fantasy would naturally be understood in context as a productive power of imagination.

<sup>97</sup> A first overview of the role of apperception in Wundt's view of gesture and language is provided by the extensive index and the passages listed there; cf. Wundt (1904b, pp. 650 f.).

<sup>98</sup> Cassirer subsequently explains this "basic apperceptive act of unification and differentiation" by reference to the "simplest act of 'pointing' towards an object given by the senses," whereby he is referring back to Platonic terminology (Sheet 1, p. 10). Accordingly, apperception would be understood as a transition from "ἄπειρον τοῦ πέρατος" or, "if we are no longer dealing with spatially present, 'graspable' things," as an "συλλαβεῖν εἰς ἓν – this συμπλοκή and this διορισμός, virtually as a basic type of thinking as such" (Sheet 1, p. 11). In *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 25–28, Cassirer addresses apperception directly following his discussion of Wundt's theory of the gesture, and he simultaneously understands it, in light of Herder's theory of the origin of language, as reflection. On Sheet 2, p. 8, he links apperception with "spoken articulation" in poetry and thus also emphasizes it in the field of aesthetics.

beyond the mere impression – the ‘copy’ – and becomes a representation [*Darstellung*] [= genetic construction] of the thing. –”

Cassirer's incidental reference to imitation as a “representation” in the sense of a “genetic construction” or as a “form of ‘genetic thought,’” however, now brings to the fore an additional, idealist link between the symbolic and the concept of the genesis. In the course of the unfolding of the symbolic, the symbolic formation of reality asserts itself. Put differently, the genesis of the symbolic has as its *telos* the symbolic genesis of the world. In that context, however, it should constantly be remembered that the symbolic permeation of the given should always be understood by reference to its point of departure. Active reproduction and formation, like the logical concept, operate on the initially given, immediately appearing sensory intuition. They thereby transform that intuition, at least ideally and *ad infinitum*, into the object of their own formation, but precisely in this emancipatory movement they remain bound up with the original givenness. Thus, in the case of the concept even in its advanced logical forms, Cassirer still found an indication of an intuition, just as it features in the “indicative gesture.” As such, both gestures indeed possess an active character, but not a purely constructive character, since they begin with an essentially sensory moment of intuition and first have to unfold as constructive formations of the world. The “indicative” and “imitative gesture,” logical concept and aesthetic form, are only possible on the basis of the symbolic and therefore depend, in their concrete form, on the unfolding of the forms of symbolization.

Even in his comments on the genesis of “aesthetic reflection” from the imitative gesture, Cassirer's understanding of that reflection can only be seen in terms of a few, quite rough basic features, and the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” will outline it only in a preliminary manner. The sparse hints, however, give evidence of the fact that Cassirer has in view here an “emancipation from sensory immediacy” that even more clearly takes place via a formation of the sensory material, and thereby within the sensory itself, than do other forms of such emancipation. He thus speaks – as already quoted – of “aesthetic ‘reflection,’ which persists in the ‘image,’ but which takes the image as a pure ‘simulacrum’ [*Scheinbild*], abandons its physical existence, and is to that extent ‘disinterested’” (Sheet 1, p. 3). As such, this “image” should be distinguished just as sharply from an “image” in the sense of the immediate sensory givenness from which any reflection must be differentiated as from a “depiction” of an object existing in itself, which – according to an understanding that was formerly widespread, but which is outdated today – would itself be generated from a real object, as it were, like a photograph: “the initially empirical intuition is also negated [*vernichtet*], absorbed by the aesthetic – the ‘image’ is not pho-

tography!" (Sheet 16, 1, p. 18, added vertically in the margin).<sup>99</sup> Thus, aesthetic reflection does not necessarily overcome "the image," but rather sensory immediacy and the understanding of it as "depiction." It essentially takes place within the sensory and transforms the "initial intuition" into an "image" of another type, which Cassirer will occasionally also call a "pure image" in the published writings.<sup>100</sup> In the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," however, we can hardly say that this manner of speaking becomes clear and develops into an established terminology. Cassirer does not develop any concept of the image corresponding to his understanding of aesthetic reflection – presumably because he views it, in spite of all the aesthetic reflection on and symbolic transformation of the sensory in terms of which it would be explained, as being all too dangerously close to the sensory givenness.

The fact that Cassirer does not employ the concept of the image to deepen his conception of aesthetic reflection, however, might still have another, less speculative cause: Cassirer connects the aesthetic with literature rather than with visual art. Thus, on Sheet 2, following the "logical moment of 'articulation,'" he contemplates the "aesthetic" potential of language, immediately referring in that context to the "moment of rhythm and 'tone-formation'" (Sheet 2, pp. 7f.). In what follows, he deals with aesthetic reflection via the example of poetry, in which context Cassirer relies, as is hardly surprising, on the example of Goethe. His first definitions of the "essential feature of everything poetic" are virtually limited to the quotation of several verses by Goethe.<sup>101</sup> Cassirer appa-

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<sup>99</sup> The reading of "*vernichtigt*" is uncertain.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ECW* 17, p. 195. The attribution "pure" refers in this context first and foremost to the fact that the practical context has been suspended, a point in which we can see a genuine possibility of the symbolic and by which Cassirer is simultaneously referring to the concept of play from Schiller's aesthetics; cf. the whole passage, *ECW* 17, pp. 195–198, as well as, for similar passages on "pure representation," *ECW* 17, pp. 422f. Already on Sheet 17, p. 4, Cassirer generalizes Schiller's definition of the aesthetic to the symbolic in this manner: "In this sense, Schiller's definition of art is too broad – what he says of art also holds true of the symbolic as such." On that point, cf. also Sheet 38, pp. 1f.

<sup>101</sup> The passage reads in detail: "For rhythm: Who, then, the changeless orders of creation divides, and kindles into rhythmic dance? That is an essential feature of everything poetic, which, however, already has its root, as is evident, in simple spoken language! (Hamann: Poesy is the native language of the human race... More plainly: here lies an ur-function that prevails equally [*gleich sehr*] in primitive linguistic expression and in the highest poetic expressions!) And furthermore: 'Everyone listens gladly to the sound that rounds itself into a tone.' This 'rounding itself' of the sound is already in effect in the first spoken articulation that points towards language" (Sheet 2, p. 8; the reading of "*gleich sehr*" is unclear).

[The English version of the text from *Faust* was taken from the translation by Bayard Taylor; cf. Goethe (1925). -Trans.]

rently sees in those verses both examples of and reflections on the aesthetic formation of language, which he essentially considers to be a structure of sound and tone. The “overcoming of the material by the form”<sup>102</sup> that Cassirer had initially attributed to the scientific concept thus probably also occurs in the aesthetic “phonetic form,”<sup>103</sup> which should be understood as a structured progression of sound in time. In the margin, Cassirer summarizes his thesis: “Even here, the basic primitive function of ‘limitation’ (πέρας) now asserts itself! Basic condition of all ‘form’ now in temporal progression – Time no longer simply ‘progresses,’ but rather [is] maintained and structured in differentiation!” (Sheet 2, p. 8). This form of time as given shape in sound is presumably more obvious to the reader of Goethe than is the image. It seems, however, to be more attractive to Cassirer in theoretical terms, probably because it can hardly be said to be given immediately from the outset and is also, first and foremost, set at a remove from any mimetic depiction.

Aesthetics, which Cassirer lists from the beginning as one form of symbolization alongside language, myth, religion, and knowledge and which, according to the analysis in the first chapter, probably also played an initial role for the expansion of Cassirer's philosophy, has only a marginal role in the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic.” There is less evidence of intensive engagement or genuine progress in his conceptual deliberations and research concerning the literary material here than in the case of language and myth. Cassirer's aesthetics ultimately remained unwritten, apart from a few smaller texts – we cannot add much to the extensive discussion of possible reasons for this fact by recourse to the records from 1917 and 1918.<sup>104</sup>

## Reformulations: Wundt's Naturalistic Genesis and Cassirer's Genesis of the Symbolic

I have discussed the first sheet of the records on the “Philosophy of the Symbolic” in a fair amount of detail because it develops fundamental conceptual perspectives for the new project and thereby lays the decisive groundwork. Cassirer

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**102** Sheet 2, p. 4.

**103** “The unitary breath [*Hauch*], the movement becomes differentiated; divides itself into various articulations and ‘phases’; the indeterminate cry determines itself into a tone, into a phonetic form. There is an almost unlimited qualitative differentiation possible here, particularly through the employment of connection in sequence” (Sheet 2, pp. 8f.).

**104** On Cassirer's aesthetics, cf. the authoritative essay by Fabien Capeillères (1995, in particular pp. 226ff.), as well as Marion Lauschke (2007).

er's reading proved to be extremely selective and apparently pursued first and foremost the goal of connecting the symbolic to the genesis of human culture. Certainly, Cassirer does not, like Wundt, understand this genesis in the naturalistic sense of the emergence and explanation of the symbolic from its natural conditions. Rather, by recourse to an idealist tradition running from Plato to Hegel, he reinterprets it by way of its active symbolic determination, with an eye to an "emancipation from sensory immediacy." Cassirer's maneuvering between Wundt's naturalism and his own critical idealism made repeated and casual use of the ambiguous adjective "genetic." As such, in what follows, I will attempt to bring together several points in the concept of the genesis, even if Cassirer himself hardly strives towards any terminological specificity. In connection, I will address the revealing discussion of the genesis in the manuscript from 1919.

Just how central the question of the genesis is can be seen in certain formulations expressed in the context of Cassirer's reading of Wundt, formulations which span the whole spectrum between a naturalistic and a transcendental conception of the genesis. On the one hand, with regard to Wundt, Cassirer sets himself in opposition to a "psychological genesis"<sup>105</sup> or a "genetical-causal"<sup>106</sup> explanation of the symbolic. On the other hand, he also characterizes the "constructive" symbolization of reality as "genetic." He does not merely, as already quoted, equate the symbolic "representation [= genetic construction] of the thing," but also "genetic thought" and "constructive fantasy."<sup>107</sup> Moreover, he is thereby alluding to the so-called "genetic definitions" that carry out such definition, primarily in mathematics, by establishing a process for construction.<sup>108</sup> Based on these formulations, I have spoken above of the *symbolic genesis of the world*, which stands as part of the Neo-Kantian tradition of the idea of transcendental generation.

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**105** *ECW* 11, p. 125.

**106** *ECW* 12, p. 25 and *ECW* 16, p. 188. For a critical view of the "empirical-genetic question" of "ethnic psychology," cf. also *ECW* 16, pp. 176 f., or in general the "genetic-psychological framing of the question" in *ECW* 12, pp. 14 f., n. 12. Cassirer also uses the simple attribution "genetic" repeatedly in this critical turn; by way of example, cf. *ECW* 1, pp. 136 and 166; *ECW* 12, pp. XI, 19, and 251, as well as *ECW* 13, p. 124. These references are not intended to be a complete list.

**107** Cf. once again the two passages on Sheet 1, pp. 7 f. In this sense, Cassirer, in *ECW* 12, p. 40, also characterizes the "constant cycle of experiential thinking" in terms of "breaking down the particular content into their constitutive factors, in order to reproduce it 'genetically' from them as its preconditions."

**108** By way of example, cf. Cassirer (1923, p. 11), and *ECW* 11, pp. 268 f. What is also of significance in this manner of speaking is the fact that Cassirer also likes to refer to Humboldt's "genetic definition" of language. I will address this point later.



The point of Cassirer's understanding of the genesis lies in integrating these two incompatible conceptions of the genesis. He thus, on the one hand, denies that the symbolic could emerge from preexisting elements and in this way be explained naturalistically, but on the other hand he does not presuppose any complete autonomy of the symbolic that would be entirely independent of its natural conditions and could serve as the basis for a unilateral symbolic construction of the world. The symbolic does, however, contain the potential for autonomy to the extent that it increasingly unfolds in the process of symbolizing the given and simultaneously makes possible reflection on the symbolic representation of the world via the emancipation from sensory immediacy. As a result, however, the symbolic is just as little independent from its unfolding in the context of the given as is the world given independently of the symbolic. *The symbolic has its own development and its own genesis in interaction with the phenomena that it both determines and in which it is specified.* The genetic view thus includes both reflection on the symbolic genesis of a world, in which experience is emancipated from sensory immediacy, as well as reflection on the genesis of the symbolic, which unfolds in the determination of the reality of the human being.

In the first section of the manuscript from 1919, with the title "The physical foundations of language formation. – Gesture language and spoken language," Cassirer explicates this understanding of the genesis of the symbolic. As in the records already discussed, he relies on Wundt's theory of the gesture, addresses the indicative gesture in a fair bit of detail, and sketches out its development towards the concept: "Thus, genetically and factually, it seems that one direct path does in fact lead from 'grasping' to 'comprehending'" (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 25).<sup>109</sup> Finally, Cassirer also introduces here the imitative gesture. What is most noteworthy, however, is that he justifies in detail the systematic meaning of this return to the "beginnings" and "origins" of the symbolic and addresses the genesis of the symbolic in Wundt's psychological theory and in his own reflection on the philosophy of the symbolic.

Cassirer frames his discussion of Wundt's theory of the gesture from the outset in terms of an *aporia* that is supposed to invalidate any understanding of the genesis as explanation or development from prior conditions and to put in its place the notion of the unfolding of the symbolic. He considers the relation between language and reason and argues that they ultimately have to presuppose one another reciprocally. To summarize, without language there would be no log-

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**109** Cf. the whole passage, *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 21–27, as well as, on the imitative gesture, *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 30–33. Cassirer's appeal to Herder's conception of "reflective awareness" ["*Besonnenheit*"] should also be emphasized; cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 28f.

ical concept – in order for such a thing to develop from language, however, language already has to contain the beginnings of the logical concept, and thereby the beginnings of reason, in “linguistic concepts.”<sup>110</sup> Instead of explaining the one by means of the other, we have a relation of reciprocal conditioning, in which both language and reason are able to determine one another mutually and to unfold continuously. Against this backdrop, the traditional question concerning the explanation of reason from language or the development of language from an ostensibly natural, pre-cultural state in a heuristic appeal to the simplest beginnings of language or reason is transformed: “If we want to avoid this difficulty, there remains no other escape than to pursue the problem of the ‘origin of language’ – given that this problem can only be posed with any legitimacy at all from the critical standpoint – back to a point that is not located prior to reason, but rather entirely within it, but which, on the other hand, does not yet belong to its developed conceptual form” (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 8f.). When Cassirer goes back to the beginnings of language and reason, he is attempting to understand them better by considering their elementary conditions and simultaneously working out the potential for overcoming these simplest beginnings and unfolding the symbolic further.<sup>111</sup>

This is the context in which Cassirer begins to address Wundt’s theory of the gesture and its approach to language: “The absolutely sensory, the mimic-physiognomic totality of simple expressive movements already contains the seed from which reason and the peculiar ‘logos’ of language unfold” (*Manuscript 1919*,

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**110** “But now, by setting out to present this origin of reason from language in detail and to demonstrate it theoretically, we consistently have to presuppose, in this context, reason and its basic concepts, at least as a general ‘potency’ and structure, and to anticipate them in terms of their essential existence. The ‘linguistic’ concept seems to mean both the premises and the consequence of the ‘logical’ concept, both its condition and its result” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 8).

**111** “Even language, in its genuine and pure spiritual character, is only accounted for when it, instead of being related unilaterally to the logical-abstract form of reason and to the logical-abstract ‘concept,’ is kept in constant connection to the problem of sensory expression. It appears at first to be nothing other than one type and one particular modality of this sensory expression itself – but, of course, one in which a tendency pointing beyond this circle is already apparent. For critical observation, which, here as everywhere, does not deal with the emergence, but rather with the existence, not with the establishment of temporal and psychological beginnings, but rather with supertemporal moments of significance and validity, what matters is to combine the beginning and end of the observation into one concept and one problem. It has to demonstrate linguistic thinking as a type of thinking that is determined by the senses, by sensory feeling and by sensory affect, and it must simultaneously demonstrate how, in the power and capability of linguistic expression, the sensory itself breaks through the limit that initially seemed established for it and attains a more comprehensive and deeper ideal significance” (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 9f.).

p. 17).<sup>112</sup> As in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer does not hesitate to give a positive evaluation to Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology*, but on the other hand he does immediately highlight his systematic differences from its "genetic-psychological approach":<sup>113</sup> "The elements of linguistic consciousness can never be 'explained' sufficiently and genuinely by virtue of a genetic-psychological process any more than can those of logical or aesthetic consciousness – given that explanation is supposed to mean that we ought to derive those elements from an indifferent psychological ur-form, one that would not itself be determined either logically, aesthetically, or linguistically, and thereby that such elements ought to be produced, as it were, from nothing. The task can only consist in demonstrating them as elements, in their idiosyncratic significance and validity, and in accounting for them as conditions, not merely of developed consciousness, but even of the simplest conscious existence that can be reached by analysis. 'Explanation' in this sense means nothing other than the production of continuity between the simplest and most complex, between the earliest and the latest, temporally speaking, contents and phases of consciousness – in which case, however, those universal formal moments, on which the possibility of this continuity itself rests and in which the 'unity of consciousness' takes shape in accordance with its various basic tendencies, always already have to be presupposed in accordance with their meaning and their validity. With this methodological qualification, we are still able to go back beyond the development of spoken language, even to simple gesture language, in order to identify the most universal moments of the linguistic form" (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 18f.).

Cassirer thus does not merely reject any explanation of language and reason, and ultimately of the symbolic, to the extent that it represents a reduction to conditions that do not themselves already entail language, reason, and symbolization.<sup>114</sup> He transforms this model of a reductionistic "genetic explanation" by reinterpreting the assumption of a continuity between the phenomena to be explained and their conditions. Wundt had assumed a continuity between cultural

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**112** Cassirer understands the gesture in the following in quite basic terms as an immediate expression of excitation, almost as a reflex; cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 19f.; however, he simultaneously emphasizes the fact that any "reaction" already contains a turn towards "action" (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 21).

**113** *Manuscript 1919*, p. 17. Between "genetic-psychological" and "approach," the word "evolutionary" has been deleted.

**114** And this holds true, as noted in *Manuscript 1919*, p. 73, with respect to the ostensible explanation of "significance sounds" from refined "sensation sounds," "however many temporal intermediate terms we might want to insert between the various levels": "The leap from one form [of consciousness, A.S.] to others ultimately remains the same and remains just as immediate whether we now begin with the first or the last term of the genetic series."

phenomena and their natural conditions, ultimately in order to be able to explain culture from its natural foundations. In contrast, Cassirer maintains a continuity within culture to the extent that the conditions of cultural phenomena must necessarily already have a cultural character. At first, this continuity thus means that the conditions, in the case of language and reason, cannot lie outside of language and reason, and that to this extent they already have to have a share therein. Additionally, however, a second meaning is also connected with this continuity, namely that culture does not constitute a stable state, but is rather found in continual transformation. It is the continuous process of the unfolding of the potential that already exists in the first and the simplest beginnings of symbolization, just as language in particular “arises in constant progress from this function” of indication (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 29). On the basis of this continuity, it is only natural if Cassirer likewise holds that observation of these simple beginnings has to be accompanied by investigation of the later stages of the unfolding of the symbolic. Namely, he argues that what matters “for the explanation of the ‘origin,’ i.e., of the content of linguistic concepts [is] nevertheless ultimately whether we begin with their ‘beginning’ or their ‘end,’ with their point of departure or their destination” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 99a). He even sees an advantage here in beginning with the “goal” or “*telos*,” because here – unlike in the case of the beginnings, which lie in the “darkness of prehistory” – “what language and the linguistic concept desire and accomplish in their completed manifestation lies explicitly at hand and is accessible to methodological analysis in all of its main determinations” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 100).

Cassirer’s engagement with Wundt is thus accompanied by a clarification of the systematic relevance of evolutionary approaches. According to Cassirer, the return to the beginnings of language carried out in those approaches does not allow for any naturalistic explanation, but it appears to be of little use descriptively as well.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, however, Cassirer is expressing with the postulate of continuity a theoretical assumption that is central for his understanding of the genesis of the symbolic. What is important in this context is not to fall into the misunderstanding that this *continuity* excludes alterations and refers to a stable state. The reason is that this continuity is rather the presupposition without

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**115** Unlike in the published texts, Cassirer explains in the manuscript from 1919 more precisely what he hopes to take from the work of Wundt beyond the reductionist explanations that he criticizes: “The results of this investigation, rather, only come into question to the extent that they serve indirectly for the purely descriptive representation and analysis of linguistic phenomena and illuminate more precisely their place in the totality of intellectual life” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 18).

which alteration cannot be understood, because a discontinuity, in complete contrast, does not imply alteration, but rather the replacement of old states by new ones. What is crucial for Cassirer is precisely the fact *that the genesis of the symbolic does not denote any original event establishing a stable state, but rather characterizes the perpetual unfolding of the potential that is present from the simplest beginnings of the symbolic.* The only state that the symbolic knows is thus that of its continual becoming.

Continuity, however, also characterizes the symbolic in an additional respect. Cassirer rejects the reduction of the symbolic to its supposedly natural conditions and views it instead as a condition of the symbolic transformation of phenomena given by the senses. In this cultural process, however, what is altered is not merely the phenomena that increasingly appear to be objects of our symbolic activity. At the same time, the symbolic unfolds its potential for an “emancipation from sensory immediacy” by way of its operation in the context of what is initially given by the senses. Its unfolding, however, is not thereby independent of the phenomena, but rather takes place precisely within their symbolization. The continuity of which Cassirer speaks thus, on the one hand, denotes the continuous and incessant unfolding of the symbolic from its earliest beginnings and, on the other hand, characterizes that unfolding in terms of its reciprocal entanglement with the sensory-empirical phenomena that are ideally transformed into objects of our symbolic activity. *The symbolic forms a continuity with the empirical-sensory phenomena to the extent that it can only unfold its conditions and its potential in terms of the symbolic transformation of these phenomena.*

These conceptual connections are only present in the published texts as fragments and are only hinted at by Cassirer's various ways of using the term “genetic.” In the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the engagement with Wundt's evolutionary history that is pursued here is present only to the extent that Cassirer takes up Wundt's theory of the gesture in the second chapter, as already cited. Although the parallels between the texts are so great as to give rise to the assumption that Cassirer was relying on the manuscript from 1919 in composing the first volume, the methodological discussion with Wundt is nevertheless omitted almost entirely. In particular, the argument for the continuity of the genesis that plays a not insignificant role in refining Cassirer's conception of the symbolic was not incorporated into the published text. To conclude, I would like to compare both passages in brief in order to highlight several additional, though less momentous shifts.

At the beginning of the second chapter in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer introduces his transcendental perspective on language, and in that context he focuses immediately on the difference between

inner or mental and outer or physical reality, a difference which cannot be presupposed since its genesis has to be grounded by the “reciprocal permeation” of “psychic content” and “sensible expression” (ECW 11, p. 123). Subsequently, Cassirer addresses the “psychology of language” with formulations that are quite similar to and partially identical with those of the manuscript from 1919, conceding that it is correct to have “categorized the problem of language as part of the problem of a general *psychology of expressive movements*,”<sup>116</sup> by which he is referring to Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology* just as in the manuscript, albeit with more precise information.<sup>117</sup> Once again with a close parallel between the first volume and the manuscript, Cassirer thus insists that such a psychology has to begin, not with states and givens, but rather with “processes and alterations,”<sup>118</sup> a task, however, which he apparently entrusts less to “traditional *sensationalist* psychology”<sup>119</sup> than to the “psychology of Hermann Cohen.”<sup>120</sup> Thereafter, the texts deviate from one another, because Cassirer, in the manuscript from 1919, now discusses the aspirations of Wundt’s naturalistic explanations critically and develops in contrast the notion of the continuity of the genesis;<sup>121</sup> conversely, in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, following a brief description of “mimetic movement,”<sup>122</sup> he straightaway addresses a more familiar “biological theory of expressive movements,”<sup>123</sup> namely Darwin’s piece *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which is only dealt with in the manuscript after the methodological engagement with Wundt. Thus, it is now the expressive movement in Darwin’s piece to which Cassirer ascribes the decisive turn in the genesis of the symbolic, the “transition from the merely ‘prag-

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**116** ECW 11, p. 124. In *Manuscript 1919*, he writes: “In this sense, modern psychological observation was correct to categorize the problem of the psychology of language as part of the general problem of a psychology of expressive movements.” I have omitted the subsequent note with a reference to the first two volumes of Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology*.

**117** ECW 11, p. 124, n. 1, further mentions Johann Jakob Engel’s work *Ideas for a Mimic (Ideen zu einer Mimik)* from 1785, which was quoted by Wundt – cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 126f.) – though, in contrast, there is no such mention in Cassirer’s records from 1917 and 1918 or in the manuscript from 1919.

**118** ECW 11, p. 124 – in *Manuscript 1919*, p. 16, Cassirer refers in the corresponding passage to the “immediate consciousness of psychic operations and psychic processes.”

**119** ECW 11, p. 124 and *Manuscript 1919*, p. 15.

**120** ECW 11, p. 124, n. 2, with reference to Cohen’s “*Aesthetics of Pure Feeling [Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls]*, vol. 1, pp. 143 ff.” In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 17, n. 1, the same work is mentioned in similar terms, though admittedly the page number – as is usually the case in this outline – is left open.

**121** Cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 17–19.

**122** ECW 11, p. 124.

**123** ECW 11, p. 125, and *Manuscript 1919*, p. 20; in the latter, “biological” is underlined.

matic' to the 'theoretical,' from physical to ideal doing" (*ECW* 11, p. 125).<sup>124</sup> In the manuscript from 1919, in contrast, he had contented himself, with a view to Darwin, to the hardly programmatic conclusion: "The 'reaction' of sensory expressive movement represents the first and most primitive tendency towards 'action' in consciousness as such" (*Manuscript* 1919, p. 21).

By omitting the methodological engagement with Wundt, Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* seems clearly less significant to the conception of the symbolic than it does in the working notes. Darwin's theory, which is now even more prominent, becomes the focus and appears from the outset in the light of the anti-naturalistic point that Cassirer had developed and refined primarily in engagement with Wundt. The subsequent statements on his theory of indicative and imitative gestures, as well as on the development "from 'grasping' to 'comprehending'"<sup>125</sup> and from "the mere repetition of something outwardly given" to "free spiritual projection [*Entwurf*]"<sup>126</sup> in art, thus exhibit significant parallels to the manuscript and apparently go back to Sheet 1, but they appear to presuppose Cassirer's anti-naturalistic argument and therefore do not provide further information on its systematic importance. As a result, the genesis of the symbolic and its continuity in becoming and with the world can hardly be understood with any greater clarity, and so Cassirer's language of the genesis pervades the published text in an ambiguous and complex manner.

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**124** *ECW* 11, p. 125: "Indeed, every elementary expressive movement forms an initial demarcation of spiritual development, in so far as it is still entirely situated in the immediacy of sensible life and yet, at the same time, goes beyond it. It implies that the sensible drive, instead of pushing forward directly towards its object [*Objekt*] and satisfying itself and losing itself in it, undergoes a kind of inhibition and reorientation, in which a new consciousness of this very drive is awakened. In this sense, the reaction contained in the expressive movement prepares the way for a higher stage [*Stufe*] of action. As the action [*Aktion*] withdraws, as it were, from the immediate form of effective action [*Wirken*], it acquires a new room to move [*Spielraum*] and a new freedom; it is, therefore, already in transition from the merely 'pragmatic' to the 'theoretical,' from physical to ideal doing."

**125** *ECW* 11, p. 127; cf. the whole passage, *ECW* 11, pp. 125–127, and the virtually identical wording in *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 21–26.

**126** *ECW* 11, p. 129; cf. the whole passage, *ECW* 11, pp. 127–130, and *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 30–33. In comparison to the pages on the "indicative gesture," this passage seems to have been revised more intensely and most notably received several amendments. In the manuscript, moreover, we find a passage between these two discussions – *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 27–30 – which, for one thing, characterizes the accomplishment of the "indicative gesture" in terms of Herder's concept of reflection and simultaneously sees in it the linguistic paradigm of inflection. I will return to this point.

## Language, Gesture, and Sound: From Wundt to Humboldt

The last sections have shown how Cassirer refines his conception of the genesis of the symbolic in his engagement with Wundt's naturalist view of the emergence of language. This conception, however, also extends the horizon of his continued reading of the cultural sciences, and in particular of linguistic research, and provides Cassirer with the necessary practical orientation for prioritizing the main points or adopting a critical stance. This engagement, however, no longer occurs on a purely philosophical field. Cassirer now links his philosophical reflection more closely with the empiricism of the cultural sciences, and he cannot avoid revising his philosophical arguments wherever there is little doubt concerning the evidence of the cultural sciences or, where there is doubt, striving for alternative discoveries in support of his claims if he wants to preserve his arguments.

In the following sections, therefore, we will consider the correlations between Cassirer's philosophical reflection and the research he was reading in the cultural sciences. To that end, I will discuss the vocal character of language for several reasons. Firstly, it borders quite closely on the previous discussions, because Cassirer views sound, unlike the gesture, as suitable for unfolding the emancipatory potential of the symbolic. Secondly, the vocal character of language thereby stands on the horizon of the *telos* of the symbolic and is linked with the linguistic conditions of the concept. Thirdly, for Cassirer, that vocal character is also characteristic of language as a specific symbolization, and fourthly it is simultaneously the object of linguistic research. The vocal character of language connects many of the concepts in the field of linguistics that have hitherto been kept rather abstract, a point which will ultimately lead us to Cassirer's reception of Wilhelm von Humboldt's linguistic research.

Already in Cassirer's records and in the manuscript from 1919, it becomes clear that the appeal to the beginnings of the symbolic in the gesture is by no means bound up with a characterization of language. Ultimately, as will be demonstrated, Cassirer does not consider the gesture to be capable of language at all, conversely privileging "spoken language," which he views as particularly suitable for unfolding the emancipatory potential of the symbolic, even beyond the context of the aesthetic: "We have, however, not taken gesture language into consideration here for its own sake, but rather only used it as evidence for the *logos* of language, for the way in which its intellectually formative basic theme extends into its earliest sensory beginnings. However, of course, this *logos* only emerges in its genuine freedom and its characteristic essence in the development of spoken language" (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 33f.). Likewise, the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* transitions immediately from Wundt's



gestures to sound: "This function of presentation [*Darstellung*], however, emerges in an entirely new freedom and depth, in a new spiritual actuality when for the gesture it utilizes the *sounds* as the means and as the sensible substrate" (*ECW* 11, p. 130). As will be demonstrated, this privileging of spoken language contradicts Wundt's theory of gesture language vehemently, and so Cassirer refers in this context to the linguistic research of Wilhelm von Humboldt, which is admittedly not mentioned in the cited passages from the manuscript and the first volume. Nevertheless, its significance for Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic emerges precisely in his conception of the vocal.

The question of the vocal is already closely bound up with the specification and unfolding of language in Cassirer's records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." After language was hardly mentioned on Sheet 1,<sup>127</sup> many of the subsequent sheets are devoted to and marked with that topic. Sheet 2, with the title "Language," highlights the employment of additional discussions right from the start: "The matter at hand is to identify the purely formal moments of the linguistic symbolic" (Sheet 2, p. 1). Cassirer is thereby, as he also does in the manuscript from 1919, advocating the thesis that language should primarily be identified with "developed spoken language" (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 29). Against the backdrop of Cassirer's reading of Wundt, this assumption is anything but self-evident. That is, Wundt, in the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology*, attributes a significant role to the gesture that Cassirer had found so interesting, since he views, not grasping, but sign languages, as used by deaf persons, but also by other cultures in general, as being grounded quite obviously in indicative, imitative, and symbolic gestures.<sup>128</sup> These sign languages, as Wundt explains in detail, with abundant material support and an eye to their grammar and syntax, are languages in the full sense.<sup>129</sup> This insight is cited with great appreciation even by, e.g., Karl Bühler in 1933,<sup>130</sup> and by all accounts it is consistent with

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**127** Among the exceptions is first and foremost an appeal to Herder's theory of language, which is apparently supposed to support Cassirer's postulate of an apperceptive "basic function of separation and identification" in any gesture, be it ever so simple: "For language, Herder has already emphasized this original act of apperception, and thus of reason, in the first spoken expression – but, as we can see, it goes back further still!" (Sheet 1, p. 11). Cassirer is assuming here that apperception, reason, and thinking are primarily realized in language, a point to which I will soon return.

**128** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 222 and 246).

**129** On the question of grammatical categories, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 191ff.), and on the syntax of sign languages, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 208ff.).

**130** Cf. Bühler (1933, pp. 128f.).

current research.<sup>131</sup> It is thus hardly a trivial task to understand why Cassirer rejects Wundt's thesis of the capability of the gesture to count as language.

Cassirer explicates his objections on Sheet 2 of his notes and refers in that context initially to the level of grammatical and syntactic structures. Along with Wundt, he understands the proposition as the characteristic accomplishment of language,<sup>132</sup> but he immediately denies that gesture language is able to form propositions in the full sense, since it only has command of a "very incomplete syntactic structure" (Sheet 2, p. 5).<sup>133</sup> No more does he concede to it its own grammar, so that the diverse structures of spoken languages, indicated here by keywords like "Inflection" and "Word Classes," are compared with an extremely impoverished gesture language. According to Cassirer, it can, "at core, only ever [say]: thing, thing, thing, or thing, visible activity, thing, visible property, activity, etc." (Sheet 2, p. 6). This claim, however, stands as a clear contrast to Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology*, with which Cassirer continues to engage on Sheet 2. That is, Wundt is openly striving for suitable and independent categories for the syntax and grammar of gesture languages. Cassirer skips over these detailed discussions in the second chapter of the first volume almost completely. Instead, he refers to the older thesis by Heymann Steinthal that gesture language does not have command of any grammar or syntax, which Wundt had specifically endeavored to refute.<sup>134</sup> Cassirer makes note of this discussion in the margin and formulates his own position: "That gesture language lacks all grammatical categories[,] is without the proposition, thus without grammar, is the claim of Steinthal (Wundt, pp. 191, 203, n.), though indeed qualified by Wundt, it remains essentially in force for us even within this qualification!" (Sheet 2, p. 5, in the margin).<sup>135</sup>

This return to Steinthal's older argumentation, which was explicitly criticized by Wundt, seems quite dubious without any detailed argument or persuasive evidence. This is all the more the case since Cassirer apparently did not make any efforts towards a more precise justification. In the corresponding pas-

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**131** Cf. Jäger (2008, pp. 153–155).

**132** "The characteristic of language, however, first emerges in that new synthesis that we call the linguistic proposition" (Sheet 2, p. 5). On that point, cf. also the note on the proposition, which is taken to be "earlier than the word," on Sheet 3, p. 4, with reference to Wundt (1904a, pp. 599 ff.), as well as Sheet 14, p. 2: "The 'proposition' as apperceptive 'structuring' of an overall representation [*Gesamtvorstellung*] (Wundt, *Ethnic Psychology* II)."

**133** Cassirer refers to the discussions concerning the "'syntax' of gesture language cf. Wundt, I, 208 ff."

**134** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 191 f.).

**135** The reference is to Wundt (1904a, pp. 191 and 203); the reading of the latter number is unclear.

sage in the manuscript from 1919, he reiterates the account of the insufficient capabilities of gesture language and invokes several aspects of Wundt's analyses in a note on the subject, ultimately with the aim of endorsing Steinthal.<sup>136</sup> A more precise argument or more detailed inquiry into the linguistic character of the gesture can no more be found here than in the records; in any case, it left no tracks.<sup>137</sup> The claim that gestures are not capable of developing any complete and independent form of language is no longer present in this explicit form in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The unwavering transition to the vocal as a genuine medium for language, however, ultimately presupposes this claim and therefore still seems to have a certain violent character.<sup>138</sup>

Cassirer's approach to language, however, now seems to run into certain difficulties to the extent that it defines language as essentially vocal, though it is nevertheless simultaneously supposed to have its beginning in the gesture, like everything symbolic.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, as in the corresponding passages from

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**136** The relevant passage is quoted here: "What the gesture, as indicative and imitative, expresses and reproduces are objects, actions, and processes perceivable by the senses; but it lacks any means of expressing relationships specifically and clearly. According to its basic character, it is already directed towards singling out and identifying things and properties, not towards accounting for ratios [*Verhältnisse*] and relations [*Relationen*]. The mere juxtaposition of mimicking expressions for concrete things or qualities only ever produces a monotonous repetition, a mere addition of signs, in which the manifold and diverse complex forms on which even the simple existence of the individual psychological 'representation' [*Vorstellung*] itself is based find no expression" (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 45 f.). The attached note explains: "While Steinthal denies to gesture language all grammatical categories and emphasizes that it is 'without the proposition, thus without grammar,' Wundt attempted to establish in it too an analogue to the logical-grammatical structure and a particular form of 'syntax' that would be peculiar to it (*ibid.*, I, 208 ff.). Nevertheless, he also emphasizes the indeterminacy that prevails in it of the ['conceptual categories' and their limitation to ['object-[,] property-[,] and state-concepts.[]] The expression is restricted here to individual intuitable representations [*Vorstellungen*]: in what logical, spatial, or temporal relations these representations [*Vorstellungen*] stand to one another, in contrast, cannot be known by these means. (*ibid.*, pp. 191 ff.)" (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 46 f.). I will discuss the decisive criterion for this task of "expressing relationships specifically and clearly" in more detail later.

**137** Only Sheet 159 seems to have the gesture as its theme once again, but it contains only two references to the secondary literature: "On the gesture language, e.g., of Cistercian monks, cf. also Sayce II, 307 ff. and Kleinpaul, *On the Theory of Gesture Language* [*Zur Theorie der Gebärdensprache*] in the *Journal for Ethnic Psychology* [*Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*] VI, 352–75 (as a supplement to Wundt's account as cited!)" (Sheet 159, p. 1). In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 22, n., Cassirer also refers to this title by Kleinpaul.

**138** Cf. *ECW* 11, p. 130.

**139** I am referring in this context to Cassirer's argumentative method, not to the reality of the situation. According to Jäger (2008, pp. 155–163), Cassirer has been proved right from a present-

the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and the manuscript from 1919, Cassirer attempts in Sheet 2 to make plausible a development from the gesture to sound, in which context he is once again relying on Wundt's materially rich account. He thus develops the idea that the "linguistic expression ... continually develops from natural expressive movements and from gesture language" (Sheet 2, p. 1).<sup>140</sup> In subsequent sentences, Cassirer describes in brief the "dissolution" of sound from the original "mimic-pantomimic whole," which, however, should not be understood as a complete detachment. Rather, he emphasizes the fact that "the cooperation of the other mimicking means of expression can also be recognized at the higher levels, but it increasingly recedes" (Sheet 2, pp. 1f.).<sup>141</sup> Cassirer briefly refers to Wundt for support several times, in which context he singles out observations from the third chapter, "Spoken Language," of the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology*, which traces the emergence of spoken language from "vocal sounds in the animal kingdom," through the "spoken language of the child," and up to "natural sounds" and "imitative sounds in language."<sup>142</sup> What matters to Wundt, admittedly, is not the transition from the ges-

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day point of view, particularly to the extent that gesture language is in fact phylogenetically older and served as the foundation for the development of spoken language. This question will not be my concern in what follows.

**140** The reading of "and" is uncertain. Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 130–132, and *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 33–38.

**141** To reproduce the passage in detail: "At first, this 'expression' now forms one single inseparable mimic-pantomimic whole, in which a phonetic factor can exist, but does not have to exist. But even in cases where it does exist, it does not initially operate in an isolated manner, but rather as a moment of the 'mimic whole' (e.g., of indicative and imitative gestures and so forth). Even in the development and learning of child language, this mimic whole still plays a significant role: only gradually is the individual phonetic factor allowed out (Further information on this point, e.g., in *Wundt*, *Ethnic Psychology* I, 296 ff.) However, by the fact that this dissolution occurs – by the fact that 'expression' is transformed into a purely phonetic and specifically phonetic expression (although the cooperation of the other mimicking means of expression can also be recognized at the higher levels, but it increasingly recedes) – the physical conditions of expression have thereby first been altered." (The deletion of "moment" between "this" and "mimic whole" has been omitted.)

**142** The fourth chapter, "The Transformation of Sound," is not mentioned by Cassirer; only the fifth, "Word-Formation," reignites his interest. With respect to the increasing dissolution of sound, as already cited in the previous note, Cassirer refers to Wundt's observations on child language in "Wundt I, 1, pp. 296 ff." (Sheet 2, p. 2); with respect to "interjections" as, so to speak, the "simplest linguistic expressions as such," he adds in the margin a reference to "*Wundt*, *ibid.*, I, pp. 307 ff." (Sheet 2, p. 2); aside from that, he makes note of a reference to "*Bücher Work and Rhythm [Arbeit und Rhythmus]*, *Wundt*, *ibid.*, I, 267" (Sheet 2, p. 3); finally, with reference to the moderation of affect in the development of spoken language, he is relying on "*Wundt*, I, 274" (Sheet 2, p. 3).

ture to sound, but rather the origins unique to spoken language. The arbitrary selection and recontextualization of the passages that Cassirer uses for his own argument and the omission of many other relevant passages that contradict his argument allow this reading to assume a quite arbitrary character.

In light of this discovery, it is crucial to inquire into the reasons motivating Cassirer's strikingly arbitrary reading. It becomes obvious quite quickly in the following pages of Sheet 2 that Cassirer is taking such an unequivocal stand here because he views "the physical conditions of expression," but also of linguistic reflection and the scientific concept, as present only in sound (Sheet 2, p. 2).<sup>143</sup> Consequently, only sound is supposed to make possible an articulation that allows or at least provides the occasion for us to reflect on our symbolization of the world and its specific linguistic forms. For that to be possible, according to Cassirer's argument, it is necessary that the presumed connection between the gesture and individual visible things or activities be overcome in favor of an articulated nexus of signs, which are determined first and foremost by their relationships to one another: "'Sound,' as compared to the other mimicking means of expression, has the advantage that it is capable of progressive 'structuring' – of articulation – in a completely different manner than are they. Thereby, taking the place of the individual sound as an expression of an individual mental state ... is a graduated system of articulated sound-units" (Sheet 2, p. 3). There ultimately results, "in place of the individual sign for the individual emotion, an extraordinarily sophisticated and subtly graduated overall system of 'signs'" (Sheet 2, p. 3). Thus, in sound is ultimately supposed to be realized the systematicity of differential signs, which is no longer constrained immediately to the things denoted, and which to that extent opens up space for reflection on linguistic symbolization itself. Sound should therefore be understood as a "first physical condition of 'reflection!'" and, by its "tendency towards this indirect medium," also leads to "detachment from the immediately affective expression" and thus to "emancipation from sensory immediacy" (Sheet 2, p. 3).

We will examine this claim in more detail, but first we should, in anticipation of the last sections of this chapter, at least point out that Cassirer understands the systematicity of signs that is realized in sound simultaneously as a "physical condition" of the scientific concept. The reason is that, by means of articulation, "arises ... gradually as such an 'attribution' [*Zuordnung*] and a 'system of attributions' within domains that are materially completely identical" (Sheet 2, p. 3). Cassirer goes on: "The immediate 'imitation' ceases and in its

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**143** In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 50, Cassirer speaks similarly of the "physical conditions and foundations of language."

place stands a mediated system of the functional ‘representation’ [*‘Abbildung’*] of a system  $F$  within a system  $C$ ,” at which point he refers in brackets to Dedekind’s theory of numbers, and thereby to his paradigm of the relational-functional concept.<sup>144</sup> The system of sounds is supposed to be distinguished from the “rational system of expression (of science)” merely by the fact that only the latter has command of a “productive series-form” and therefore facilitates an inner “derivability” (Sheet 2, pp. 4 f.).<sup>145</sup> Sound thus functions as an appropriate “physical condition” of the scientific concept to the extent that it is capable of realizing a system of differential signs that can be mapped functionally onto other articulated systems and which merely lacks the inner logical-lawful structure for scientific knowledge.

Consequently, Cassirer’s discussion of spoken language and gesture language stands under the auspices of the “emancipation from sensory immediacy” that represents the *telos* of the symbolic as such and which can be realized in particular in the scientific concept. Moreover, the question as to “in what the peculiar advantage of this phonetic symbolic in particular consists and to what it can be ascribed” can be given an answer, inasmuch as Cassirer attributes the ability to function as a “physical condition” of reflection only to sound (Sheet 2, p. 1).<sup>146</sup> He justifies this answer essentially by reference to sign theory, in that he believes all gestures to be bound tightly with the objects they denote, while phonetic signs are defined differentially and are ultimately able to form a closed and autonomous system. Even if we grant this questionable assumption, however, the central step of the argument has still not been carried out: why do these systems of signs that are realized in spoken language, allow for reflection on linguistic symbolization? How do they, unlike gesture languages, form the impetus, not only for symbolizing the world, but also simultaneously for reflecting on the linguistic relations by means of which what is symbolized is first determined at all? Without an answer to these questions, it remains baffling why the phonetic aspect of language is supposed to represent the “physical condition” of the unfolding of the symbolic that culminates in insight into the symbolic genesis of the world.

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**144** Cf. Cassirer 1923, pp. 35–42.

**145** On this point, cf. also Sheet 42, pp. 1f.

**146** In detail, the passage following the already quoted first sentence at the beginning of the sheet reads: “If we begin with the fact that ‘spoken language’ is only a special case of linguistic expression as such, one which develops continuously from natural expressive movements, from gesture language (see previous!), then the question arises as to in what the peculiar advantage of this phonetic symbolic in particular consists and to what it can be ascribed.”

In a central passage from Sheet 2, we find an answer, though admittedly one which will raise new questions. In a brief comparative characterization of gesture and sound, Cassirer refers once again to Wundt when he initially claims: "The gesture 'depicts' things and actions: what it lacks is any expression of relations. Therefore it contains, as a result of the requirement of immediate intuitability, a preponderance of the object-representation [Gegenstandsvorstellung] as such" (Sheet 2, pp. 5f.).<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, the expression of relations now seems to be a privilege of spoken language: "With the 'analogy,' spoken language seems to dispense with immediate similarity, but just so it becomes capable of expressing relations in a far more complete and purer way! 'Articulation' now attains a higher logical level: structuring in accordance with grammatical categories, which simultaneously go back to basic logical categories" (Sheet 2, p. 6).<sup>148</sup> Consequently, the essential difference consists in the possibility of "expressing relations." Whether the relations that determine the symbolization are expressed is supposed to decide, on Cassirer's view, whether we are able to reflect on the symbolic determination of the world and develop scientific concepts.

As a result, the question arises as to why sound, unlike the gesture, is supposed to be suitable for expressing relations. Cassirer's argument in this respect links together two levels, which are worth distinguishing. On the first level, sound and gesture are considered as signs that preserve different relations to what is designated. Cassirer attributes to gesture a grounding in terms of similarity, and therefore a relation to the intuition of objects and activities. It provides us, as it were, with the sensory givennesses from which the symbolic is nevertheless supposed to emancipate us. In contrast, by implication, sound would be an unmotivated and arbitrary sign that is determined solely by differences. Admittedly, Cassirer does not make this assumption explicit, and even less does he employ the structuralist vocabulary on which I am relying here. A second level, rooted in linguistics, pertains to the different possibilities for "expressing relations" via gesture language or spoken language. Cassirer suggests that, because of the grounding of gesture in similarity to what is designated, all expressions of gesture language fall apart into a disconnected sequence of objective representations [*Vorstellungen*], whose relations to one another and whose inner unity is by no means highlighted. By virtue of the fact that sound, at the level of

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**147** Cassirer adds the reference in parentheses: "(cf. Wundt 219, where this is correctly emphasized; it [the gesture, A.S.] is therefore already, according to its basic character, oriented in a more 'substantialist' direction!) 197ff. limitation to concepts of objects, properties, and states – no relational concepts!" On this point, cf. also Wundt (1904a, pp. 221f.).

**148** In the margin, Cassirer added: "On this connection, e.g., Trendelenburg, *The Categories of Aristotle [Die Kategorien des Aristoteles]*."

signs, does not depend on similarities, in contrast, it seems to be able to express grammatical categories or syntactic relations and thus to allow them to become audible: “Sound, however, which has freed itself from this ‘immediacy’ as such, can now, in its differentiation, also express a completely different level and layer of purely mediated relations” (Sheet 2, p. 7).<sup>149</sup> Consequently, Cassirer seems to be of the view that the linguistic discovery of the capability of expressing relations should be comprehended as a consequence of the differentiation of gesture and language in sign theory.

This argument, however, is rife with presuppositions, as Cassirer makes explicit in his working notes, as well as in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>150</sup> The distinction in sign theory between sound and gesture seems just as questionable as its alleged consequences for the capabilities of spoken language and gesture language, not only of expressing objective representations [*Vorstellungen*], but also the relations that determine them. Furthermore, on both counts, philosophy alone cannot be the decisive factor, but rather must take note of the relevant research in linguistics. I would first like to problematize Cassirer’s distinction between gesture and language in terms of sign theory, and subsequently its alleged linguistic consequences.

The claim that gestures are defined by similarity to what is designated may turn out to be extremely questionable if we actually begin with *sign language*, since such a language – as Wundt already emphasizes in spite of his assumption of an “original” similarity in gesture – is of a highly conventional character.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, Cassirer himself had emphasized on Sheet 1 in the case of the “imitative” or “reproductive gesture” that we are dealing here, not with an immediate

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**149** *Manuscript 1919*, p. 46, puts it similarly: “By dispensing here [in spoken language, A.S.] with any mimicking agreement, with any sensory or tangible equivalence with what is designated, the sign becomes free for the first time to account for and determine the most diverse relationships – the intuitable as well as the unintuitable.”

**150** “If with its plastic imitation the gesture seems better adapted to the character of ‘things’ than, as it were, the disembodied element [*Element*] of sound, then sound acquires its inner freedom precisely by the fact that in it this relation is broken off, that it is a mere becoming, which can no longer immediately reproduce the being of objects [*Objekte*]. On the objective side, it now becomes capable of serving, not only as an expression of content-related qualities but above all as the expression of relations and the formal determination of relationships; on the subjective side, the dynamic of feeling and of thinking are imprinted upon it” (*ECW* 11, p. 131). This quotation – like the whole passage – seems rife with loans from Humboldt’s philosophy of language. In Cassirer’s “disembodied element of sound,” thus, we can hear echos of Humboldt’s thesis that sound “contains only so much of the *physical* as external perception cannot do without”; cf. Humboldt (1999, p. 65).

**151** Cf. Wundt (1904a, p. 155).



depiction, but rather with an active reproduction. In comparing gesture and sound, in contrast, Cassirer consistently considers “imitation” or “reproduction” to be a gateway to similarity, instead of working out the genuine potential that is present in the “representative gesture.” In this respect, it would be necessary to engage with the characteristics of the gesture more precisely.

No less biased seems the assumption that sounds per se have nothing to do with similarity or are at least detachable from it. In terms of sign theory, it is nowadays virtually state of the art to claim that sounds, like signs in general, are defined differentially. In light of the fact that Cassirer does not accept this argument with respect to the gesture, however, it seems quite doubtful that it should be presupposed for sound without further efforts. Moreover, Cassirer's assumption that sound has nothing to do with similarity also penetrates into the region of the linguistic sciences so that it can be demonstrated by reference to the phenomena of onomatopoeia or sound-painting [*Lautmalerei*]. Cassirer's claim on Sheet 2 that the theories of the emergence of language from onomatopoeia are doomed to failure will perhaps meet with little opposition.<sup>152</sup> His thesis, which he expresses simultaneously, that all onomatopoeic elements can ultimately count only as a remnant of similarity that must be dispelled, in contrast, requires in turn an empirical proof. Because we are not dealing with a question that is solely philosophical or conceptual, but rather also empirical, Cassirer attempts to rely on materials from Wundt, and he notes in the margin of Sheet 2: “Contra the theories of imitation, cf., e.g., Wundt, *ibid.*, II, at the conclusion” (Sheet 2, p. 4). This reference, however, does not give unconditional evidence of a careful reading, because Wundt discusses the diverse phenomena in a quite sophisticated manner, and so one can hardly make use of him for such an unambiguous decision on the substance of the matter.<sup>153</sup> In particular, in the case of Wundt, we must distinguish between the thesis of an origin of language in the imitation of sounds and a purely descriptive analysis of the onomatopoeic elements of language. Such an analysis is certainly of interest to linguists.

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**152** “Already in this situation, all attempts to derive language from vocal imitation in the usual sense, from onomatopoeia, fail – Rather, language is already in its primordial beginnings precisely the overcoming of onomatopoeia – the overcoming of the similarity of sounds by way of a completely different form of correspondance” (Sheet 2, p. 4).

**153** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 317–359, in particular pp. 354–359), as well as, which is probably Cassirer's point of reference, Wundt (1904b, pp. 614–647, in particular pp. 619–622 and 636–638). I will forgo reconstructing Wundt's position here, since that would also entail addressing anew in this respect, not merely his view of gesture language and spoken language, but also his critique of the theory of the origin of language.

tics and must engage with the structures of the language in question in an impartial manner.

In this case, Cassirer is entering into an old and winding discussion, and he also continues his research in the following years.<sup>154</sup> His position, however, hardly seems to have altered, because Cassirer both continually and decisively takes a stand against onomatopoeia. Thus, in the manuscript from 1919, after he has rejected the thesis of an origin of language in the imitation of sound, he unapologetically observes: “Sensory proximity to the impression, as demonstrated by onomatopoeic formations, must be overcome if language is supposed to develop into a spiritual expression. Only in this distance from sensory immediacy does the independent character of the form emerge” (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 65f.).<sup>155</sup> This statement is not limited to the context of the discussion of the origin of language, but is rather characteristic of Cassirer’s view of the unfolding of the symbolic potential of language: ostensibly direct, onomatopoeic references to phonetic phenomena should be understood as a resistance in the context of which the symbolic has to work itself out and against which it has to establish its autonomy. The second chapter of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* substantiates how Cassirer shifts the onomatopoeic elements of spoken language into such a perspective on the unfolding of the autonomy of language. The reason is that the discussion of onomatopoeia in that chapter does not lead to any decision on the linguistic question. Rather, it results in the introduction of the “sequential stages” of “mimetic, analogical, and truly symbolic expression” that pervade the structure of the book and inscribe a specific *telos* into the genesis of the symbolic (*ECW 11*, p. 137).<sup>156</sup>

The connection between Cassirer’s philosophical reflection and empirical research in linguistics thus seems, in the field of onomatopoeia, to be given a rather biased, philosophical resolution. Cassirer does indeed take up the empirical discoveries at first, to the extent that they are of assistance in rejecting older, speculative theories of the origin of language in the imitation of sound. From the discovery that there is no empirical evidence for an actual dissolution of onomatopoeia, however, he does not conclude that onomatopoeia has to be taken seri-

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154 Cf. Sheets 20, 47, 48, 65, and 177. These sheets were provisionally filed after 1919 in a collection of new notes on onomatopoeia. They all bear this keyword, often added after the fact, and were numbered from 1 to 12, thus in part being numbered for a second time; cf. the sheets in GEN MSS 98, Box 23, Folder 435.

155 Cf. the whole passage, *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 61–67. Among the theories of the emergence of language from onomatopoeia, Cassirer deals not merely with the imitation of sound, but also with the “derivation of language from emotive sound [*Gefühlslaut*]” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 70).

156 Cf. the whole section, *ECW 11*, pp. 133–146.

ously as a linguistic phenomenon and that its description represents a linguistic challenge. Instead, he abandons the empirical question concerning the description of language and insists on his philosophical perspective on the unfolding of the symbolic potential of language. As such, he comprehends all onomatopoeic elements as a likely necessary resistance to the emancipation from sensory immediacy, but one which must nevertheless be dissolved, and he introduces the corresponding schema of mimicking, analogical, and symbolic that not least helps him to arrange the empirical findings. How this organizational schema and the *telos* for the symbolic that is articulated therein relate to linguistic research and its empirical discoveries, however, apparently remains an open question.<sup>157</sup>

Cassirer's argument for the "advantage" of sound thus turns out to be quite fragile, even in terms of its presupposition in sign theory. Nevertheless, I would once again like to address the consequence that he draws out from this presupposition, namely, that only spoken language is capable, not merely of expressing objective representations [*Vorstellungen*], but also the linguistic relations that determine them. The reason is that this conclusion rests on further implied presuppositions that Cassirer essentially obtains from linguistic research.

Initially, the only consequence of the assumption in sign theory that sounds are defined in a purely differential manner, independent of all similarity, is that syntactic relations and grammatical categories *can* be expressed by sounds that do not themselves exhibit any independent, objective significance: they signify nothing in the world and can for that reason enter into the formation of words and propositions in order to express the linguistic relations inherent within them. However, even the simple observation that a spoken language could, on Cassirer's description, proceed just like a gesture language, merely stringing together the objective representations [*Vorstellungen*] of "thing, thing, thing, or thing, visible activity, thing, visible property, activity, etc.," nevertheless makes it clear that it does not follow merely from the differential definition of sounds that such sounds also actually express the syntactic and grammatical relations

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**157** Cassirer explains his position on this question only in terse hints, perhaps most clearly in *ECW* 11, p. 270, where he suggests a structural instead of a historical understanding of such arrangements: "We may attempt to arrange these aspects ["on the basis of which language arrives at its classifications and attributions," A.S.] by taking as a guiding principle the constant progress from the 'concrete' to the 'abstract' that determines the tendency of language development in general: although we must bear in mind that it is not a question of a temporal but of a methodological stratification and that in a given historical form [*historischen Gestalt*] of language, the strata that we shall attempt to differentiate may exist next to and with one another or may be intermingled in a variety of ways."

that matter to Cassirer (Sheet 2, p. 6).<sup>158</sup> As such, we must add to the necessary condition a linguistic presupposition pertaining to the structure of specific languages, whereby Cassirer's argument attains some plausibility. Namely, it presupposes the model of inflected languages, in which individual phonetic components of words denote syntactic structure and grammatical distinctions. This thesis is already confirmed on Sheet 2, where Cassirer explains: "'Articulation' now attains a higher logical level: articulation according to grammatical categories, which simultaneously go back to basic logical categories. Inflection and inflection-signs; characteristics of word-classes as an expression of logical relationships (noun, adjective)" (Sheet 2, p. 6). It is thus the concrete language-type of inflection, in which relations are expressed linguistically in sound, that serves as the means by which objective representations [*Vorstellungen*] are determined.

Consequently, one specific type of language underlies Cassirer's argument for the advantage of spoken language over gesture language and his understanding of sound as a "first physical condition of 'reflection!'" (Sheet 2, p. 3). More precisely, they presuppose the interpretation of inflection that had been worked out by Wilhelm von Humboldt. It is Humboldt's linguistic research on which Cassirer bases the assumption that is formative for his view of language, the assumption that "dissolution" from similarity is accompanied by the "overcoming of the material through the form," and that an "emancipation from sensory immediacy" thereby becomes possible in sound, but not in gesture.<sup>159</sup> Sound thus becomes a two-faced being, a figure standing between philosophical reflection and empirical linguistic research. Admittedly, we find already in Humboldt both empirical analyses of the linguistic structure of specific languages and problematic speculations concerning the hierarchy and historical development of languages in the model of inflection. As a result, Cassirer will not be able to avoid engaging with the critique of Humboldt's legacy in linguistics.

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**158** Thus also *Manuscript 1919*, p. 49: "The spoken 'articulation' forms the first condition and foundation for all higher and wider-reaching linguistic structurings as depicted, e. g., in the syntactic structure of the proposition."

**159** The passage reads in full: "Because now a similarity, as it still exists to a certain degree in the gesture, is no longer physically possible at all in general – because sound does not at all lend itself to such similarity any longer – the 'dissolution' now increases more and more – the overcoming of the material through the form" (Sheet 2, p. 4).

## Cassirer's Reception of Humboldt's Linguistic Research: A Brief Overview

In what follows, the question of the role of Humboldt in the genesis of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* neither can nor should be discussed as a whole. Before the following section turns once again towards inflection and enters into the linguistic debate, however, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Cassirer's multifaceted and consequential reception of Humboldt. The records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" from 1917 and 1918 document a detailed reading of Humboldt's famous text *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, which Cassirer, as is customary, usually calls simply the "Introduction to the Kawi Work."<sup>160</sup> He probably works through this text, which was not mentioned previously in his writings, for the first time in the context of his research on linguistics. Then, in the manuscript from 1919, he relies just as prominently on Humboldt's "Introduction" as he does in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, Cassirer himself refers to the Humboldt's foundational significance for his observations on language as a symbolic form in the preface to the second volume.<sup>162</sup> As such, this significance is well-known, though admittedly the discussion has hitherto focused mostly on several prominent, virtually topical references by Cassirer to Humboldt's terminology, without pursuing them any further.<sup>163</sup>

The records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic" now grant more precise insights into the significance of Humboldt's linguistic research for the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic. At first, they generally confirm the central role of Humboldt, although only Cassirer's study of the "Introduction to the Kawi Work" left any tracks and there are no signs of any broader reading of Humboldt.

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**160** For an introduction to this text, cf. Donatella Di Cesare (1998).

**161** Cf. the passages with explicit references to Humboldt's "Introduction" in *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 39–43, 50–52, 75–77, 113f., 116f., 151–163, and 185f., as well as, for the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the index in *ECW* 11 and the passages listed there. In the published works, to my knowledge, the text is first mentioned in "Goethe and Mathematical Physics" ["Goethe und die mathematische Physik"] from 1921; cf. *ECW* 9, pp. 268–315, here pp. 302f. This publication follows the second edition from 1924; the passage, however, is also contained in the first edition.

**162** *ECW* 12, p. XV: "If in the case of language, a systematic consideration could – from the standpoint of method if not of content – build upon Wilhelm von Humboldt's seminal investigations, in the domain of mythical thinking there were no such methodological 'guidelines.'"

**163** By way of example, cf. Paetzold (1981, pp. 306–311), who already addresses many of the points that will be discussed in what follows. No information concerning Humboldt's role in Cassirer's philosophy of language can be found in P. Caussat (1990).

In addition, however, Cassirer's records do demonstrate the necessity of expanding on Humboldt's significance in several respects. A first important and prominent respect is Humboldt's role in the continuing development of Kantian philosophy. On Sheet 24, as in the essay "The Kantian Elements in Wilhelm von Humboldt's Philosophy of Language" ["Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie"] from 1923, Humboldt is credited with having opened up the field of language to Kantian philosophy by making use of its methodological approach in order to justify his own philosophy of language.<sup>164</sup> According to Cassirer, Humboldt "carried out in the philosophy of language the Copernican turn corresponding to the Kantian 'revolution in the way of thinking'": "He no longer began with what is 'designated' and its similarity to the 'sign,' but rather with the energy and the mode of designation itself" (Sheet 24, p. 1). In this respect, it is completely possible that Humboldt represented an additional impulse for Cassirer's expansion and deepening of his own philosophy. Namely, Cassirer had already been dealing with Humboldt in *Freedom and Form*, though admittedly with an exclusive eye towards the concept of the state. In prior research, however, he may have also been acquainted with his philosophy of language, at least in outline.<sup>165</sup> Admittedly, the records considered in the present study offer no further evidence for this thesis.

Cassirer draws from this first aspect the extraordinarily productive conclusion that the Kantian synthesis of the given manifold into objects of experience should be understood first and foremost as an accomplishment of the linguistic formation of representations [*Vorstellungen*]. Cassirer thus deals with language on Sheet 24 in terms of the "formation of the world of representations [*Vorstellungswelt*]" and the "transition from the mere sensory 'impression' to the articulated 'representation' [*Vorstellung*]"<sup>166</sup> where it thus takes the place of Kant's

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**164** Cf. *ECW* 16, pp. 105–133; on what follows, cf. particularly pp. 109–111 and 120–133. In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 76, Cassirer also presents Humboldt as a "student of Kant, whose essential critical standpoint, whose 'Copernican turn,' he applies with complete methodological consciousness to the justification of the philosophy of language." Cf. the whole passage, *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 75–79.

**165** Thus, e.g., in *ECW* 7, pp. 290–292, Cassirer cites Humboldt's letter to Schiller from September 1800, which, according to the judgment of Di Cesare (1998, p. 38), "represents in a certain respect the birth certificate of Humboldt's philosophy of language." The letter can be found in Friedrich Ebrard (ed., 1911, pp. 257–297), and according to that pagination Cassirer connects passages from pp. 273, 279, and 280 by way of ellipses and merges them into a characterization of the works of Goethe and Schiller. Cf. the statements central to the philosophy of language in Ebrard (1911, pp. 283–290).

**166** Cited in context: "As in the logical the 'concepts' [are] not images of objects, but rather 'conditions of the possibility of objects' – so too, we are not asking here: what does language

transcendental logic, which had been the perspective in which Cassirer situated mathematical logic and the operation of the scientific concept since his epistemo-critical writings. In this respect, he now joins company with Humboldt when he allows the Kantian judgment to be realized in the proposition and locates the function of the series-concept, which was already supposed to be responsible for structuring sensory perception in *Substance and Function*, first and foremost in language: “Concept-formation via series-formation. Provisional series-formation via the ‘word’ in language as a first approach to the conceptual articulation of the whole of intuition. In the ‘sign’ of language, this analysis and synthesis is first attained!” (Sheet 24, p. 4).<sup>167</sup> Cassirer occasionally characterizes this linguistic shaping of our world of representations, following Humboldt, as the “inner form” of language, though admittedly the systematic significance of this concept is probably often overestimated in Humboldt, as well as in Cassirer, who complains about the former’s lack of clarity.<sup>168</sup> What is decisive is the fact that Cassirer focuses on a linguistic structuring of the mental processes of perception, which he will unfold beginning with Humboldt on Sheet 24 and then develop further on Sheet 33, which is referenced in the prior passage.<sup>169</sup> In the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, in contrast, the diverse struc-

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accomplish as an impression of a world of representations that is already existent – but rather to what extent is it a vehicle for and condition of the formation of the world of representations, for the transition from the mere sensory ‘impression’ to the articulated ‘representation.’ This is the problem for us!” (Sheet 24, p. 2).

**167** On *ECW* 16, p. 121, he writes concisely: “Objectivation into thoughts must proceed by way of objectivation in spoken language.” On proposition and judgment, cf. *ECW* 16, pp. 121–123, and *ECW* 11, pp. 293 ff.

**168** Sheet 24, pp. 1f.: “Here we come to the concept of the ‘inner form of language’ that Humboldt endeavors to identify. In Humboldt himself, this concept [is] not defined in a completely unambiguous manner. –” In *ECW* 11, p. 255, Cassirer also emphasizes the ambiguity of the concept. However, he does occasionally use the concept; by way of example, cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 52 and 113, *ECW* 11, pp. 2 and 10, or even *ECW* 12, p. 15. On the “difficult to explain phenomenon” of the “central position of the ‘inner form of language’ in Humboldt research,” cf. De Cesare (1998, pp. 85–89). We can assume that this concept from Humboldt – like many others – was handed down influentially by way of Heymann Steinthal and that Cassirer too perceived it as such. On Sheet 24, Cassirer refers repeatedly and, apart from the initial reference to Humboldt, exclusively to Steinthal (1888); cf. there for the depiction of Humboldt on pp. 58–81, though admittedly without any mention of the inner form. On Sheet 20, p. 3, Cassirer mentions the inner form in reference to Steinthal (1871, p. 431). On the inner form of language as an objectivation of the human-world-relation in Steinthal, cf. also Hartung (2012, p. 37), and in connection with the moment of emancipation in Lazarus, cf. Hartung (2012, pp. 65–67).

**169** On the linguistic “formation of impressions into representations,” cf. also *ECW* 11, pp. 147 and 251f.

tures of various languages stand front and center; the complementary psychological side of this formation of representations [*Vorstellungsbildung*] is only carried out in its necessary detail and complexity in the third volume.<sup>170</sup>

A second important connection between Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic and his reception of Humboldt's linguistic research is no less foundational. Like Sheet 24, Sheet 23 also begins with Humboldt, albeit in order to unfold an independent observation pertaining in this case to the role of vocalicity in language with respect to the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity.<sup>171</sup> With the help of the famous passage from the "Introduction to the Kawi Work," which Cassirer cites on the first page of Sheet 23 and in the introduction to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,<sup>172</sup> Cassirer develops the notion that it is precisely the experience of vocal expression that can serve as the occasion for conceiving of the given in general as an object of one's own active determination. The reason is that I experience my expression in the objectivity of a sound, which can confront me, on the one hand, as something foreign and – as in myth – as something commanding.<sup>173</sup> On the other hand, however, it can also, in terms of its objective determination, be referred back to my own activity and can therefore become a clue leading towards insight into the determination of the world by the activity of symbolization.<sup>174</sup> The expression and the sign thus

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**170** With reference to the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, cf. Schwemmer (1997, pp. 50–57 and 69–125).

**171** In Cassirer, the dialogical character of language- and representation-formation [*Vorstellungsbildung*], which Humboldt links with the vocal, is indeed occasionally mentioned in the records from 1917 and 1918 (for example, cf. Sheet 24, p. 4), but it is hardly the main focus; with regard to Humboldt, cf. Di Cesare (1998, pp. 41–46).

**172** Cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 54f.), Sheet 23, p. 1, and *ECW* 11, p. 23. On Sheet 23, p. 2, Cassirer also, with an eye to Humboldt's notion that language combines "even the self-activity of the human being with his receptivity," refers to "Steinthal, *Origin of Language*," pp. 69ff."

**173** In myth, creative activity submits, as it were, to its expression by ascribing to that expression power over itself; cf. Sheet 23, pp. 3f. On Sheet 34, p. 2, Cassirer writes: "The underlying reason is in all cases the one that Humboldt demonstrates with respect to language: what is expressed belongs completely to the sphere of excitation, of the subjective; but it does not remain in this sphere – as something expressed, it has already become something external, something that we confront, – something simultaneously spontaneous and receptive – something that has been worked and a work, which binds our free subjectivity. Thus, language passes from the mere interjection to ego and object-intuition – the subject becomes a substance, the consciousness of activity transforms into consciousness of the world – productivity into the intuition of the product." Thereafter follows the example of myth.

**174** Sheet 17, pp. 2f.: "Gradually, myth and the material power of the sign withdraw – then, however, the ideal stands the test all the more – it becomes something that rules indirectly through the formation of our representation [*Gestaltung unserer Vorstellung*]. – Through this 'for-



appear to be the “beginning of any idealization”<sup>175</sup> and “emancipation from sensory immediacy.”<sup>176</sup> Therefore, on Sheet 18, “Moments of Symbolic Expression,” Cassirer declares unambiguously that “the sign [is, A.S.] also the first necessary transit point for any ‘reflection’ whatsoever (cf. Sheet 1): of consciousness not only of the impressions, but over them; beginning of activity and spontaneity, of intellectual self-liberation” (Sheet 18, p. 7).

On this level of the philosophy of language, we could mention further important instances of Cassirer borrowing ideas. We could discuss the slogan, which has been given a great deal of attention in the literature, of language as “*energeia*” instead of “*ergon*,” which can be found in Humboldt and which is invoked frequently and almost topically by Cassirer. Likewise, we could address more precisely the differentiation of the relationships of the designating sound to what is designated into mimicking, analogical, or symbolic varieties, which, in turn, can be found in Humboldt’s “Introduction to the Kawi Work” and which should probably be counted as a model for the identical and already mentioned distinction from the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>177</sup> In accepting this difference,

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mation’ that we accomplish in the sign, we then once again engage with reality. (Mathematical sign (purely ideal); mathematical physics, technology!) Thus, the activity of the sign stands the test at a higher level – we discover it in the context of the sign – only through the mediation of the sign can we prove it at the highest spiritual level. – We break free from the immediate force of ‘things’ by way of the ‘symbol,’ becoming ‘free’ – but thereby we are now subordinating the ‘thing-world’ to ourselves, commanding it.”

175 Cited in context: “The sign as a beginning of any idealization, of breaking free from the momentary ‘reality’ towards ‘significance’ – every sign is in this sense detached from the earth’s gravity, is form and ‘play,’ a mere ‘image’ of life, in which we remove ourselves from it in order to draw it to ourselves once again –” (Sheet 17, pp. 3f.). Directly afterwards, Cassirer refers to Schiller’s aesthetics and its significance for the determination of the “symbolic as such.”

176 On Sheet 62, p. 2, Cassirer explains by reference to “the world of spoken language, the world of artistic formation, of myth, and so forth”: “Here is established a purely sensory manifold (the sounds of language, the shapes of visual art), which nevertheless is ‘manufactured,’ constructed by us, which is completely permeated, as in language, by the pure relations of thought, or, as in art, by the pure subjectivity of feeling; thus, something sensory that no longer confronts the activity of spirit as a mere substance [*Stoff*], but rather ‘reflects’ that activity itself and expresses it symbolically. The manifold of sound is indeed not received by us like the objective noises, but is rather produced by us in accordance with determinate gradations, in accordance with categories and nuances of thought (cf. Language, Sound-system).”

177 This point of connection can be traced out step by step. Cassirer initially records Humboldt’s distinction concerning the “connection” that “exists between the *sound* and its *meaning*” (Humboldt 1999, p. 72) on Sheet 56, p. 1: “3fold use of the sound distinguished by Humboldt; a) immediately imitative (onomatopoeic) [pp. 76 ff.], b) symbolic sound-relation (according to feeling quality), stationary, consistent, fixed – impression of what is fixed, symbolic sound-relation [addition omitted, A.S.], c) similarity of sound according to the relationship of concepts (analog-

what ultimately comes to expression is the fact that Cassirer, like Humboldt, does not begin with the assumption that the relation of language to the world depends on the arbitrariness of the sign. Rather, the latter develops gradually in correlation with the linguistic determination of the world, as has already been addressed above in the discussion concerning the overcoming of the onomatopoeic elements of language, in which Cassirer similarly refers to Humboldt.<sup>178</sup> In this case – as always – it would be necessary to ask how Cassirer takes up this connection, namely by relocating Humboldt's concepts and arguments and adapting them to another context. This is all the more necessary since Sheets 23 and 24 prove that Cassirer's reading of Humboldt is influenced by the writings of Steintal, which had a long-lasting impact on Humboldt's legacy.<sup>179</sup> Cassirer's appeals evoke a proximity between his own thought and Humboldtian philosophy of language that would require a more precise and critical analysis.

Humboldt's linguistic research ultimately has a foundational significance for Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic in a third respect. By all accounts, Cassirer reads at first only the "Introduction to the Kawi Work," which focuses on the philosophy of language, and he thereby goes along implicitly with a separation between the philosophical and the empirical, more precisely the linguistic, part of the work that had already set in by that time.<sup>180</sup> Cassirer, however, is apparently not interested in this text merely from the standpoint of the philosophy of language, but rather also with an eye to its empirical observations. We thus find in the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," alongside the philosophical musings connected with Humboldt on Sheets 23 and 24, the shorter, usually one-

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ical significance of the sound), alteration of concepts by virtue of variation of sound." In *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 38–43, Cassirer then explicitly invokes Humboldt's distinction between analogical and symbolic designation. In the introduction of this distinction in *ECW 11*, p. 137, in contrast, no explicit reference to Humboldt can be found; cf. this distinction also in *ECW 12*, pp. 278 f.

**178** On Sheet 36, p. 1, Cassirer notes: "Rejection of onomatopoeia – active construction of the 'world' through the linguistic sign. (Humboldt), p..." If we follow Di Cesare (1998, pp. 46–51), Humboldt does not begin with the per se arbitrary character of the word, but rather with its iconic character, and he understands the arbitrariness of the word as a potential for its unfolding. On the "intermediate position of language between image and sign," however, cf. primarily Jürgen Trabant (1986, in particular pp. 71–90, with the quoted formulation on p. 81). Furthermore, on Humboldt's critique of the arbitrariness of the sign according to Condillac, cf. Trabant (1986, pp. 129–155).

**179** On the mediating role of Steintal, cf. Di Cesare (1998, pp. 14 f.).

**180** On this point concerning the publication history of the work, cf. Ulrike Buchholz (1986, pp. 1–6).

or two-page Sheets 53 to 61, which predominantly record insights concerning specific linguistic phenomena from the "Introduction to the Kawi Work,"<sup>181</sup> in which context Cassirer occasionally consulted additional literature.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, Cassirer already emphasizes Humboldt's transition from the philosophy of language to empirical research in the manuscript from 1919,<sup>183</sup> and he similarly, in "The Kantian Elements of Wilhelm von Humboldt's Philosophy of Language," stresses the fact that Humboldt "confronted the diversity of the empirical material, the fullness of the facts in the history of language" (*ECW* 16, p. 118).<sup>184</sup> Cassirer thus understands Humboldt as a philosopher of language *and* as a linguist, a point which cannot count as self-evident today, according to the judgment of qualified critics.<sup>185</sup> In Cassirer's records, in contrast, Humboldt appears to be a

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**181** To recapitulate in brief, the themes are presented as follows: "Determination – Series-Formation" (Sheet 53), Material and Formal Elements of Language (Sheet 54), Verb and Proposition (Sheet 55), the "Sound-System of Language" (Sheet 56), "Genus, Grammatical Gender" (Sheet 57), "Pronouns" (Sheet 59), Roots (Sheet 60), "Inner Form of Language" (Sheet 61); Sheet 58 is connected systematically with the observations from Sheet 24.

**182** The primary reference here is Georg von der Gabelentz (1891), who is mentioned almost on every sheet and occasionally in the margins.

**183** *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 113f.: "Concerning the nature of this processing [of the 'world of objects' by way of the 'world of sounds,' according to the preceding citation from Humboldt 1999, pp. 59f.; Cassirer gives the incorrect page number, A.S.], concerning its complexity and freedom, of course, no abstract formula is capable of giving account. In order to attain at least a mediated intuition of this process, no other path seems to be open than to go straight into the middle of it, into the empirical-historical development of individual languages, in order to attain here, in the context of the particular, inductive material, a felt understanding for the spiritual tendencies that are co-operative in the structure of any language. After Humboldt, who possessed both the gift of the finest psychological empathy and a sensitivity to the detail of the linguistic phenomena, as well as an eye for the most universal speculative connections, had trodden this path for the determination of the 'inner form of language,' he pursued more and more the empirical comparison of languages."

**184** The proposition reads in full: "In that Humboldt, with these two ideal presuppositions and requirements, confronted the diversity of the empirical material, the fullness of the facts in the history of language, he gained access for the first time to the inner richness of these facts as well as the unitary spiritual form that binds them together" (*ECW* 16, p. 118). In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 223, Cassirer also mentions Humboldt's "opposition" to "Hegel's 'absolute idealism.'"

**185** Thus, Di Cesare (1998, p. 15) emphasizes the "peculiar goal" of the "Humboldtian project," that of "accomplishing a synthesis of philosophical reflection and empirical research in linguistics," ultimately concluding: "Humboldt's work remains, both in the past as well as in our century, unfamiliar in terms of its inner context, and furthermore his philosophical reflection is kept apart from linguistic research. Considered in this manner, Humboldt appears to be a *philosopher of language*, whose undoubtedly exciting observations are condemned to remain unused and unusable empirically" (Di Cesare 1998, p. 18, note omitted). For more detail on the close connection between transcendental reflection on language with empirical research into languages in Hum-

linguistic researcher who considered both his empirical studies and his theoretical reflection to be integral parts of his work.

Thus, Humboldt's texts do not merely provide Cassirer's project of a philosophy of the symbolic with a variety of inspirations from the philosophy of language, but also an appropriate point of entry into empirical linguistics. For Cassirer, however, many of the obvious points of connection with Humboldt's linguistic research will turn out to be insidious. The reason is that Humboldt's impact on linguistics consisted not least in the fact that his works were immediately subjected to a determined critique, both in terms of their methodological and empirical questions.<sup>186</sup> Because Cassirer, however, only takes note of this debate in linguistics after his reading of Humboldt, he himself becomes entangled in this critique: since he believed prematurely that he could base his philosophical reflection on Humboldt's linguistic research, the critique of that research also puts Cassirer's own philosophical reflection into question and possibly even impels him towards a revision of his terminology and arguments.

It is this respect that is of particular interest for the question concerning the role of the cultural sciences in the genesis of Cassirer's philosophy of culture that is pursued in the present study. We will therefore not focus on the proximity between Cassirer's philosophical approach to language and Humboldt's observations on the philosophy of language. Instead, in what follows, we will take up Cassirer's reception of Humboldt in terms of the fact that it opened up a point of entry into linguistic research and thus intertwined philosophical reflection thoroughly with empirical questions in linguistics. In so doing, we will focus on the question that emerged in the discussion of the "advantage" of sound over the gesture, namely, that of to what extent the claim concerning the expression of linguistic relations in sound and the possibility for reflection on the symbolic genesis of the world is dependent on Humboldt's analysis of the specific function of sound in inflected languages. As such, we will pursue this question solely with the help of the "Introduction to the Kawi Work" and the texts in linguistics that were added by Cassirer in opposition to Humboldt's theses. In contrast, the empirical "main part" of the Kawi work will be left out, although Cas-

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boldt, cf. Di Cesare (1998, pp. 31–34 and 51–56) and Trabant (1986, pp. 34–36, as well as 1990, pp. 43–47 and 50–52). Dorothea Jecht, in her monograph, focuses on this "two-sidedness" of Humboldtian linguistic research and identifies it as an "*aporia*," namely the "inability to mediate between (idealist) theory and (positivist) research" (Jecht 2003, p. 2). According to Jecht, this *aporia* is not only reflected in a split in the secondary literature on Humboldt as a linguistic theorist or a linguistic scientist (cf. Jecht 2003, pp. 24–26), but rather also in Humboldt's manifold self-descriptions of his linguistic research; cf. Jecht (2003, pp. 228–233 and 293–318).

**186** On this point, cf. once again Di Cesare (1998, p. 13).

sirer does rely on it as well in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>187</sup> This reading left no tracks in the working phase from 1917 to 1919 that is considered here.

## Humboldt's Analysis of Inflection and the Historical Interpretation of Roots

The extent to which the vocality of language, which Cassirer takes up from Humboldt on Sheet 24 and which appears there as a token of philosophical reflection on language, can simultaneously be understood as an object of linguistic research can be seen on Sheet 56, with the general title "Language." There, Cassirer's claim that vocality represents the appropriate medium for expressing relations is closely bound up with the paradigm of inflection and ushers in the linguistic debate. In the first line, the heading mentions the keywords "Sound-System of Language"<sup>188</sup> and thereby draws on a number of sections from Humboldt's "Introduction to the Kawi Work" that consistently have that phrase in the title – though admittedly with the plural "languages" – and specify it by way of further key points.<sup>189</sup> Cassirer sets aside Humboldt's discussions of the differential definition of sounds and the elementary phonetic unity of the syllable in the first section and addresses the section "Sound-System of languages. Allocation of sounds to concepts."<sup>190</sup> There, Humboldt is dealing with the formation of words from syllables, by means of which – as Humboldt imagines it – concepts

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**187** Cf. the compilation of references to *On the Kawi Language on the Island of Java* in the index of *ECW* 11.

**188** Sheet 56, p. 1. After a semicolon, it continues: "Connection of sound with the concept; 'relation of the manifold of representations [*Vorstellungs-Mannigf.*] to the sound-manifold." I will leave out this aspect because it pertains to the linguistic formation of representations, with which I will deal no further here.

**189** Cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 65–80). The titles read in detail: "Sound-system of languages. Nature of the articulated sound," "Sound-system of languages. Sound-changes," "Sound-system of languages. Allocation of sounds to concepts," "Sound-system of languages. Designation of general relations," "Sound-system of languages. The sense of articulation," as well as "Sound-system of languages. Technique of this."

**190** The exceptions are a remark referring to the difference between the articulated sound and the animal "cry" (Sheet 56, p. 1), which is based on Humboldt (1999, p. 65), and a note, referring to Humboldt (1999, pp. 77f.), on the "resistance" of the sound against the "inner idea" that is supposed to be expressed in it.

are supposed to be designated linguistically.<sup>191</sup> Cassirer records the central thesis: “‘Imagining’ of the notion in the sound. Designation of related concepts by related sounds (73)” (Sheet 56, p. 1).

This apparently simple notion proves to be extremely rife with presuppositions as soon as we inquire into the criteria for relating concepts or sounds. If we begin with the fact that concepts are not given independently of language, this entails first and foremost that we must identify how the relation of sounds is to be understood and how it is manifest in sound. It is characteristic of Humboldt's approach that he refers in this context to the formation of the words that are supposed to designate related concepts and defines their phonetic relation by the fact that they have been constructed according to a common pattern and therefore have certain phonetic elements in common, while they are distinguished phonetically by other elements. Namely, he reformulates his thesis that “*related concepts*” are “designated by *related sounds*” to the effect that the “sound affinity” of words “can only become apparent in that one part of the word undergoes a change subject to certain rules, while another part remains, on the contrary, quite unaltered, or changed only in a readily observable way. These *fixed parts* of words and word-forms are called the radical parts, and if presented in isolation are termed the *roots* of the language itself. In some languages these roots are seldom found naked in connected speech, and in others not at all. If the concepts are precisely separated, the latter, in fact, is always the case. For just as the roots enter into discourse, so they also take on in thought a category to match their combination, and hence no longer contain the naked and formless root-concept” (Humboldt 1999, p. 71). This concept of roots has apparently been formed systematically with regard to inflected languages, as demonstrated by Humboldt's subsequent reference to Sanskrit and the “Indian grammarians” that have long characterized the paradigm of inflection in the history of linguistics (Humboldt 1999, p. 71).

Cassirer leaves the concept of roots unmentioned on Sheet 56, instead devoting himself to it on Sheet 54, beginning with a later discussion by Humboldt and connecting it closely with his philosophical grasp of language. Cassirer's four-page record states: “Humboldt's differentiation of objective and subjective roots (105) – inflection. It is the pivot about which the perfection of the linguistic organism revolves (109). 2 elements a) designation of the concept and b) transpo-

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**191** “By *words* we understand the signs of particular concepts. The syllable represents a unity of sound; but it becomes a word only if it acquires significance on its own, which often involves a combination of several. In the word, therefore, a dual unity, of *sound* and *concept*, comes together” (Humboldt 1999, p. 70).

sition of the same into a *determinate category of thought*" (Sheet 54, p. 1).<sup>192</sup> These few keywords weave together a variety of conceptual threads. In the referenced section, Humboldt had attributed to roots the task of mediating between the "diverse natures of *concept* and *sound*" for the designation of concepts (Humboldt 1999, p. 92). In this respect, he identifies them as "quasi-radical *intuitions* and *sensations*, whereby every language, according to the genius that animates it, reconciles in its words the sound with the concept" (Humboldt 1999, p. 92). These "quasi-radical *intuitions*" can originate from outer intuition or inner sensation, which is why Humboldt distinguishes between "objective" and "subjective roots."<sup>193</sup> This designation of a concept with the help of roots, however, now forms an indissoluble connection with the "transposition" of that concept "into a particular *category* of thought" (Humboldt 1999, p. 100). Cassirer cites this formulation verbatim and thereby refers to one of Humboldt's observations, according to which an attribution of the concept to a grammatical category is already carried out in word-formation. Namely, the grammatical category to which the word belongs and the syntactic position it can take up in the proposition is determined by the syllable that is added to the root.<sup>194</sup> This aspect of word-formation is admittedly expressed in varying degrees in different sorts of languages and is only realized in its "perfection" in inflected languages.<sup>195</sup> Humboldt thereby distinguishes the "*degrees* to which the different languages meet this requirement" (Humboldt 1999, p. 100). In so doing, Humboldt also characterizes the "*internal change*" of the unitary, albeit compound word in inflection

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**192** The page reference "(105)" and the organization of the two aspects into "a)" and "b)" were added by Cassirer between the lines.

**193** Cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 94 ff.).

**194** "For to the act of designating the *concept* itself there is allied also a special operation of the mind which transposes that concept into a particular *category* of thought or speech; and the word's full meaning is the simultaneous outcome of that conceptual expression and this modifying hint. But these two elements lie in quite different spheres. The designation of the concept belongs to the ever more objective practice of the linguistic sense. The transposing of it into a particular category of thought is a new act of the linguistic self-consciousness, whereby the single case, the individual word, is related to the totality of possible cases in language or speech" (Humboldt 1999, p. 100).

**195** "I have already alluded in the foregoing (pp. 91, 98) to the likeness of the cases where a word is derived from the root by addition of a general concept, applicable to a whole class of words, and where it is designated in this way by its position in speech. The operative or restrictive property of languages here is actually that which we are accustomed to lump together under the terms: *isolation* of words, *flexion* and *agglutination*. It is the pivot about which the perfection of the language-organism revolves [...]" (Humboldt 1999, p. 100). On Humboldt's typology of language and the advantage of inflection, cf. also Di Cesare (1998, pp. 114–124).

and the “*external increment*”<sup>196</sup> to the word in agglutinative languages by differentiating them into “mechanical procedure” and “organic process.”<sup>197</sup> In contrast, the so-called isolating languages can be counted as the antithesis of inflection, with the unaltered, isolated roots being strung together and expressing all grammatical categories and syntactic relations solely by way of the word order in the sentence. For Humboldt, what has to serve as a paradigmatic example of this type of language is Chinese, which serves him, as it were, as the counterpart to Sanskrit for the paradigm of inflection.<sup>198</sup> These differences and distinctions should be at least noted here, but will not be discussed further.

This brief account should have made it clear how sound in inflected languages is capable, not only of designating concepts and objects, but also of expressing the linguistic categorial relations through which representations [*Vorstellungen*] and states of affairs are articulated and determined. It is this use of sound, specific to inflection, that makes it, on Cassirer's view, a “physical condition” of reflection on symbolization: the fact that the inflected syllables make audible the relations by which the object of linguistic symbolization is determined gives rise to the insight that linguistic designation does not reflect things that are given in isolation, that exist in themselves, but should rather be understood as an active representation that stands under the specific conditions of one form of symbolization. As such, Cassirer understands sound as a “physical condition” of reflection on the symbolic genesis of the world and simultaneously of our “emancipation from sensory immediacy.” However, Cassirer's understanding of language in terms of the philosophy of the symbolic thereby turns out to be dependent on Humboldt's paradigm of inflection, as well as on the role of sound in the formation of words and sentences through inflection.

The proximity of Cassirer's understanding of symbolic reflection to Humboldt's language-type of inflection, however, also runs the risk of taking on the speculative elements that are deeply entwined with Humboldt's analysis. The historical interpretation of inflection as outlined in the “Introduction to the Kawi Work” proves to be particularly fragile.<sup>199</sup> Humboldt – at least according to a simple and widespread interpretation, which is apparently by no means

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**196** Humboldt (1999, p. 102). Cf. the whole passage (Humboldt 1999, pp. 102–108, and concerning the transition by way of “*accretion*” in particular, pp. 103f.).

**197** Humboldt (1999, p. 104). On Humboldt (1999, p. 101), he continues: “What corresponds, on the other hand, in the inner shaping, to the concept of inflection, differs precisely in that the duality we started from in defining this concept is made up, not of two elements at all, but only one, transposed into a specific category.”

**198** Cf., e.g., Humboldt (1999, pp. 20 ff. and 71 f.).

**199** On what follows, cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 70–72 and 90–108).



unknown to Cassirer – begins with the assumption that languages develop towards inflection. Earlier and simpler languages, accordingly, would not have formed their words through composition, instead merely putting the isolated root words in sequence according to a determinate sentence order. The inflected languages are supposed to have developed from such “more formless”<sup>200</sup> languages and “formless root-concepts,”<sup>201</sup> as Humboldt’s discussion repeatedly suggests: through “accretion” [*Anbildung*],<sup>202</sup> additional roots could enter into word-formation alongside the stem, roots that have lost their own meaning, developed into inflected elements, and formed a system of inflection.<sup>203</sup> Humboldt understood this as a higher development or more perfect shape of language, because the inflected languages express their form in sound itself via both word- and sentence-formation.

This historical linguistic thesis concerning development from more formless to inflected languages must have been extraordinarily tempting to Cassirer, since it would mean that inflection and its use of sound would prevail in history, and thereby the “physical condition” of symbolic reflection, like that of the scientific concept, would sooner or later come into existence. Admittedly, this situation gives rise to the danger of misunderstanding the genesis and the *telos* of the symbolic, which is supposed to highlight first and foremost the potential of the symbolic without having to predict any teleological development, as a historical thesis in the vein of Humboldt’s speculative historical interpretation of roots and the development of inflection. Under the impression of his reading of Humboldt, Cassirer himself does not seem immune to such a misunderstanding, though admittedly the linguistic critique of Humboldt’s speculative tale will soon disabuse him of that notion.

Cassirer merely records the main features of Humboldt’s historical view of inflection and roots on Sheet 54 by way of several quotations, without giving any indication of his own stance towards this view. On Sheets 2 and 3, however, he links Humboldt’s teleology of language with his own engagement with Wundt and with central themes from his discussion of the genesis of the symbolic. The records on Sheet 3 begin with a section from the last chapter of the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology* with the title “Word-Formation,” which, following the “Psycho-physical Conditions of Word-Formation” and the “Psychology of Word-Representations,” is dedicated to the “Position of the Word in Language.”<sup>204</sup> There,

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**200** Humboldt (1999, pp. 3 and 211).

**201** Humboldt (1999, p. 71).

**202** Humboldt (1999, p. 103).

**203** On “accretion” and inflection, cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 109–115).

**204** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 583–606).

Wundt distinguishes between “basic elements” and “relational elements,” and thus between the elements of a word that remain constant throughout its various applications and those which are dependent on the way in which the word is embedded in the sentence.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, we are once again dealing with inflection, which is nevertheless reformulated in such a way as to fit perfectly with Cassirer's view of the relational concept in mathematics.<sup>206</sup> Cassirer simultaneously links it with his attachment to Wundt's theory of the gesture by mapping the distinction between “basic” and “relational elements” onto that between the “reproductive” and “indicative gesture,” and he simultaneously associates it with its unfolding in aesthetic or logical reflection: “Thus, resulting from the demonstrative (epideictic) element, which is already manifest in the indicative gesture, is the relational (inflectional) element of language; from the function of the ‘imitative’ gesture (better, the formative, the mimetic...), in contrast, [results] the basic element. This inflectional element, which is already grounded in simple ‘indication’ (Sheet I), then develops further into the spiritual ‘relational form’ as it is depicted in an isolated manner in logic and science – the ‘mimetic’ element finds its highest spiritual expression in art, which is directed towards

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**205** “Once again, what we call here basic elements are those sound components that are characteristic of the concept that remains constant within a particular word-group, while the relational elements encompass those components through which that concept is somehow modified, and thereby simultaneously brought into a relation to other words entering into the speech. Because these relational elements likewise occur with a similarly sense-modifying effect in the modified forms of other words, they thus also possess a relatively constant meaning. Here, however, this meaning does not consist only in a concept that can be thought independently, but rather in a *conceptual relation* that always requires combination with basic elements for its genuine realization in consciousness” (Wundt 1904a, p. 584).

**206** In this context, this record seems to have been created prior to Cassirer's reading of Humboldt's “Introduction.” That is, Cassirer does not merely record Wundt's terminology, but rather, alongside the distinction of various “language types,” and in particular “the ‘agglutinative’ and the ‘inflecting,’ – the languages of substance and form,” also makes note of more or less relevant designations of roots, which – like, in particular, Humboldt's “‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ roots,” which Wundt only mentions in a footnote – do not yet seem to be familiar to him at this point in time: “Concerning the differentiation of ‘basic elements’ and ‘relational elements’ that constitutes one of the most important steps in the construction of language, as it were, the first step towards spiritual ‘articulation.’ (Distinction of language types herein, e.g., the ‘agglutinative’ and the ‘inflecting,’ – the languages of substance and form), the differentiation by Cur-tius is of interest. He distinguishes (cf. Wundt I, 587) between predicative and demonstrative roots: the former constitute the basic moment for the basic elements, the latter for the relational elements. [Naming roots and indicative roots; otherwise called substance- and form-roots, Wilhelm von Humboldt ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ roots, because the latter are not determined by the object to be designated, but rather from the subjective standpoint of the speaker.]” (Sheet 3, p. 1). Essentially, Cassirer is referring here to Wundt (1904a, pp. 583–588).

the purely 'objective' (that which is 'replaced' by relations, e.g., of a temporal, 'causal' type)" (Sheet 3, pp. 1f.).<sup>207</sup> It thus seems possible to parallel the unfolding of the potential of Wundt's indicative gesture towards the scientific concept and that of the imitative gesture towards aesthetic reflection without any great difficulty with the development of language towards inflection. At the same time, however, Cassirer's conception of the genesis thereby reveals its proximity to a historical-teleological understanding of the development towards inflection: "The developed languages are all already on the path towards a rich unfolding of relational forms ('forms of inflection' – [formal moment (Humboldt) in contrast to the material as such] – from this point, the path branches off towards the formula of logical and mathematical 'calculus,' which [is] indeed likewise a type of language!)" (Sheet 2, p. 3).

A historical understanding of the genesis and the *telos* of the symbolic, however, leads us astray, as further research into the discussion of inflection in linguistics quickly demonstrates. That is, Humboldt's tendency to weave speculation concerning the history of language into his analysis of inflection and to link it with organic concepts like root and word-stem had already long since ignited a debate in linguistics. Cassirer's hope for a possible confirmation of the *telos* of the symbolic in the specific field of linguistic history did not stand the test and swiftly required modifications. As Cassirer notes on Sheet 60, Humboldt himself had already referenced the critique of an interpretation of roots as the primitive words of once-existing languages: "Roots were already explained by Bopp as grammatical abstractions: a view with which Wilhelm von Humboldt (pp. 73–75) agrees only within certain limitations" (Sheet 60, p. 1).<sup>208</sup> Cassirer also found this critical approach explicitly in Wundt's section on "Word-Formation." It is not merely that Wundt's discussion introduces the assumption of linguistic roots, an assumption which has been well-known since the time of the ancient Indian grammarians of Sanskrit, as well as the "differentiation of language types on the basis of the theory of roots" that is supposed to delineate

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**207** Once again, more succinctly: "We thus everywhere apprehend the endeictic function as the source of relations, the mimetic function as the source of substance – Thing, representation [*Vorstellung*], the former developing further in logic and science, the latter in art: language as such, however, naturally partakes in both, as logical and aesthetic elements are mixed in it" (Sheet 3, pp. 2f.). Furthermore, in *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 29f., Cassirer views not only spoken language, but even the inflected languages, as developing from gesture.

**208** The remainder of the sheet, following a horizontal dividing line, reads: "On root theory, cf. von der Gabelentz, pp. 289 ff., of only relative value: the 'roots as the unity of genetically related words and forms, which the creator of the language had in mind as prototypes during his creation' (Pott)."

a historical development of languages (the isolating, agglutinative, polysynthetic, and inflecting type) (Wundt 1904a, p. 587). In so doing, he refers to Humboldt's "Introduction to the Kawi Work" and to Heymann Steinthal's *The Classification of Languages* [*Die Klassifikation der Sprachen*] from 1850 in order to criticize decisively both the "conceptual system extracted from organic life"<sup>209</sup> of roots and stems and the thesis of a historical "evolutionary series"<sup>210</sup> of language types.<sup>211</sup> He summarily rejects the "language type" as an improper generalization, and he limits the concept of roots to a purely analytical category of linguistics. The reality of past languages, the diversity of their structural laws for the formation of words and propositions, as well as their complex historical development, should, according to Wundt, be grasped neither by way of a historical understanding of linguistic roots as original words nor via the questionable classification of language types.<sup>212</sup>

Wundt's critique of Humboldt's concept of roots thus fundamentally puts into question the notion that any historical reality corresponds to the structural significance of "root elements" in the formation of words and propositions or the classification of languages. If these objections were to strike true, then in particular Humboldt's assumption that the historical development has its beginnings in the "more formless"<sup>213</sup> languages and their "formless root-concepts"<sup>214</sup> and that it leads towards the inflected languages, and thereby towards the vocal articulation of the relationships that form the word and the proposition, would be deprived of any foundation. At first, the speculation concerning the history of language by Humboldt probably raised Cassirer's hopes of finding a historical proof for the *telos* of the symbolic in the field of language. This question, however, is connected to the concept of roots, over which philosophy no longer has sole command. Philosophy sought out connections to the linguistic sciences and must now allow its reflection to stand up to the measure of the discussions of linguistic research.

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**209** Wundt (1904a, p. 586.)

**210** Wundt (1904a, p. 588).

**211** We must concede here, as so often in these pages, the fact that the depiction of Humboldt is not sharply distinguished from his influential interpretation by the so-called "Humboldtians," which seems justified in the context of the present study given that Cassirer's reading may have followed in these tracks and stood in particular under the influence of Steinthal. On the development of language typology following Humboldt in particular, cf. Trabant (1986, pp. 181–188, and 1990, pp. 63f.).

**212** Cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 589–599). A similar critical discussion can be found at the end of the second volume on language; cf. Wundt (1904b, pp. 631–633).

**213** Humboldt (1999, pp. 3 and 211).

**214** Humboldt (1999, p. 71).

On Sheet 3, Cassirer initially left Wundt's critical methodological reflection unmentioned, although he does refer to the corresponding section of *Ethnic Psychology*. He returns to it, however, on Sheet 46, without giving any indication of a familiarity with the wider literature. The title, however, outlines the fact that the inquiry has become more specific and that Cassirer is beginning to engage more closely with the linguistic phenomena and the associated technical discussions: the keyword "Language" is similarly specified in the first line as "On the question of roots," which is left-justified despite its role as a subtitle, and Cassirer records his reference on the following line: "Wundt's view, see I, 585 ff." What Cassirer notes thereafter has already been mentioned. From Wundt's perspective, the concept of roots can only refer to a structural characterization of languages, which is why it is suitable neither for classifying language types nor for describing a development in linguistic history.<sup>215</sup> Cassirer records central points from Wundt and concludes quite correctly: "At any rate, the fact remains on this view that, purely descriptively, completely apart from the genetic question, there is a distinction to be made between basic and relational elements, or between material and formal elements (Humboldt). Naming roots and indicative roots (see Curtius) [p. 587]" (Sheet 46, p. 1).

These headings appear rather hesitant compared to Wundt, who is decisive on this point. The thesis of the development of inflection, and thereby the expression of grammatical categories and syntactic relations in the word itself, seems to be too attractive a confirmation of Cassirer's view of the unfolding of the symbolic for him to write it off without further ado, following Wundt. At the same time, however, this passage indicates additional systematic problems and a deeper research into the linguistic literature: "The developed languages separate these elements with greater or lesser clarity; they exhibit an advancing consciousness of this fundamental distinction. Through this distinction is first perfected the articulation of the masses of representations [*Vorstellungsmassen*], their apprehension under linguistic-logical categories. (Such is the interpretation of the 'formal' part of Humboldt!) Even if there do not exist historically any purely isolating, any purely inflecting languages (Chinese probably emerged from an

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**215** "Wundt distinguishes basic elements and relational elements (cf. pp. 453, 584), but he denies that the basic element has ever actually existed as a real root. This view is rather, like that of the golden age, etc., a product of myth-making fantasy (cf. p...)] no pure root-period of languages (595); therefore even the division of language types on the basis of root-theory [is] disputed, in particular there are no formless languages (p. 592). 'Bashful existence' of roots in current linguistic research; e.g., in Brugmann (see p. 595!) Root-concept exists as nothing but a pure constitutional concept: as an expression for the fact that there exist sound-complexes that can be traced unaltered through a series of words. (597)" (Sheet 46, p. 1).

earlier inflecting period (cf. Wundt, p. 589 and Delbrück, pp. 47, 118, with reference to Jespersen, pp. 112ff.), this point of view as such nevertheless remains in force" (Sheet 46, p. 2).<sup>216</sup> In spite of the emerging substantive objections, Cassirer is apparently attempting to preserve Humboldt's thesis to the extent that the structural determination of inflection outlines a potential of the symbolic that is possessed by all languages and which they are determined to realize. Concerning Wundt's strict separation between the structural characterization of specific languages and the historical-genetic question of the development of language, he remains rather hesitant and ambivalent.

This question, however, is no longer a purely philosophical matter; it has become the object of a linguistic research dedicated primarily to empirical phenomena. Furthermore, in the 19th century, this research often operated in a positivist manner and readily broke away from Humboldt's speculative interpretation in terms of how it understood itself methodologically, which does not mean it was likely for its own part to limit itself to mere facts to the extent that it claimed. Cassirer apparently considered it an indispensable task to work through the discussion surrounding the concept of roots, and he does so by beginning with Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology*. In the note just cited, he refers to Berthold Delbrück's *Basic Questions of Linguistics. Discussed with Consideration to W. Wundt's Linguistic Psychology [Grundfragen der Sprachforschung]* from 1901. On Sheet 46, Cassirer notes: "'Bashful existence' of roots in current linguistic research; e.g., in Brugmann (see p. 595!),"<sup>217</sup> and he adds in the margin a reference to additional literature: "on the current state of research on this question, cf. also Delbrück, *Principles*, pp. 113 ff., Sütterlin, see Sheet 44" (Sheet 46, p. 1). The references pertain to the already mentioned piece by Delbrück,<sup>218</sup> as well as to Ludwig Sütterlin's *The Essence of Linguistic Structure. Critical Remarks on Wilhelm Wundt's Linguistic Psychology [Das Wesen der sprachlichen Gebilde]* from 1902, which,

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**216** The restrictive "probably" was added between the lines; the information following "Wundt, p. 589" first contained "von der Gabelentz," which was nevertheless crossed out, while the references to Delbrück and Jespersen were added in three lines that were written in small letters and crowded close to the margin.

**217** The passage in Wundt reads: "Because one can probably not address all these concerns alone, there has gradually come to pass in recent linguistics a state of ambivalence. Roots begin to lead a sort of 'bashful' existence in stark contrast to the expansive discussions that were devoted to them in the past" (Wundt 1904a, p. 595).

**218** The fact that Cassirer refers here to "Delbrück, *Principles*" is perhaps the result of a confusion with Hermann Paul's *Principles of Linguistic History [Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte]* from 1886. Wundt (1904a, pp. 597, n. 1) cites "Delbrück (Basic Questions of Linguistic Research, pp. 113f.);" the previous footnote in Wundt (1904a, pp. 595f., n. 1) refers to "H. Paul's 'Principles of Linguistic History.'"

alongside the first volume of Karl Brugmann's *Outline of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic Languages* [*Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*] from the year 1886, were both quoted in the second edition of the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology*.<sup>219</sup> Delbrück and Sütterlin, for their part, already refer in the title of their works to "Wundt's linguistic psychology" and attempt to defend the theory of the root against the critique from the first edition of the first volume of *Ethnic Psychology* from 1900, which Wundt, for his part, uses in the aforementioned footnote to respond to his critics polemically.

Cassirer thus seems to be walking in the footsteps of Wundt and following these clues in his ongoing research. He devotes some attention to the works of Delbrück and Sütterlin, not only because Sheet 44, to which Sheet 46 refers, is devoted to Sütterlin's text, but also because a number of sheets record individual references to Delbrück.<sup>220</sup> It is thus probable that Cassirer first encountered the significance and the problem of the concept of roots and of linguistic typology in Wundt's *Ethnic Psychology* and followed up on his references. The results are initially unclear. Sheet 44 records important points from Sütterlin's *The Essence of Linguistic Structure* with ascending page references and thereby touches on the question of roots, among other topics. Cassirer notes: "Roots – The notion that individual instances of so-called 'roots' once existed as real words, not to be discarded without further ado, cf. p. 33. Objections against Wundt's view of 'roots,' see also pp. 56 f. – even the ancient linguists did not proclaim the independence of root-cores unrestrictedly, as noted by, e.g., Curtius (58). Max Müller's theory of root words as the ultimate linguistic facts – *Science of Language*, 2, 356" (Sheet 44, p. 1).<sup>221</sup> This record does not pertain primarily to the object of the discussion, but rather records Sütterlin's commentaries on Wundt's position and also opens up the discussion's frame of reference by introducing "Max Müller's theory of root words," which is taken up again on Sheet 140.<sup>222</sup>

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**219** For the reference to Brugmann, cf. Wundt (1904a, pp. 595 f., n. 1), as well as the substantiation in the previous note.

**220** Cf. Sheets 47–50. The first two one-sided sheets pertain to the question of onomatopoeia, the more extensive Sheet 49 to case forms and Sheet 50 to the "originality of the sentence prior to the word." The sheets contain further references and notes to additional literature.

**221** The formulation "individual instances of" was added between the lines above a brief deletion.

**222** This sheet, with the title "Language," refers to the German translation of Max Müller's *The Science of Thought* (translated as *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*) from the year 1888 and his engagement with Alfred Ludwig's *Agglutination or Adaptation* [*Agglutination oder Adaptation*] from 1873, which Cassirer probably did not consult himself. According to Cassirer's headings, Müller had taken up an intermediate position: "Probably lies halfway between Ludwig's extreme

Delbrück's position is recorded on Sheets 69 and 70, with the titles "Root" and "Language. Inflection," in which context Cassirer is admittedly not referring to the book mentioned by Wundt, but rather to the *Introduction to the Study of Language* [*Einleitung in das Sprachstudium*] from 1880. Both sheets deal with themes related to the questions of roots and inflection, and they also take up Delbrück's historical retrospective on the discussion of the concept of roots and inflection running through Bopp, Schlegel, and Humboldt. Ultimately, however, both chronicle Delbrück's assessment of the current state of the discussion: "Contemporary view of the 'root,' see *ibid.*, pp. 135 ff.; no claim of seeing therein pieces of a former reality. They are grammatical abstractions of which we avail ourselves in order to make the representation intuitable' (136) Root stem and suffix continue to be related only as grammatical helping expressions. (174)" (Sheet 69, p. 1). Sheet 70 too records Delbrück's assessment under the heading "Contemporary state of the question": "we have become indifferent to the question of the origin as such (137)" (Sheet 70, p. 2). Cassirer notes a similarly skeptical evaluation of the historical interpretation of roots on Sheet 167 by reference to *Introduction to the Science of Language* by Archibald Henry Sayce from the year 1880.<sup>223</sup>

In light of the overview carried out concerning the discussion in linguistics, Cassirer could hardly avoid abandoning the historical-genetic interpretation of Humboldt's concept of roots, as well as any speculation on the teleology of language concerning its development from the more formeless to the inflecting languages. It was not only Wundt who held roots to be linguistic abstractions, to which no historical reality corresponded. He was preceded in this critique by Franz Bopp, as mentioned by Humboldt and noted by Cassirer, but also by August Friedrich Pott, as invoked by Wundt in a quotation that Cassirer may have read.<sup>224</sup> Most notably, however, this view had apparently prevailed, as re-

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view, that the so-called grammatical elements of language have never led a separate existence at all, and the opposing view of de Saussure ... that we can analyze any form into its smallest component elements (218)" (Sheet 140, p. 2).

**223** The sheet bears the title "Language" and consists of the brief note: "Root only as abstraction; final element of analysis; no (monosyllabic) period of roots cf. Sayce II, 4 f. contra Whitney. The so-called Aryan period of roots signifies in truth only the analysis of the oldest Aryan vocabulary (II, p. 10)." As he does throughout the sheets, Cassirer refers here merely to "Sayce I" or "Sayce II" – inspection of the passages mentioned, however, confirms the reference to the work mentioned above.

**224** "I should not fail to mention, as an aside, that the old master of language A. F. Pott, despite his 'dictionary of roots,' has already long supported the view that roots are mere grammatical abstractions, though of course without thereby renouncing the assumption of a real significance



search into the more recent literature revealed. The concept of roots was not merely extremely controversial; a renowned linguist who would have supported a historical development from once-existing formless root-languages towards the inflected languages could hardly be found at all. It had turned out to be an error to connect the genesis and the *telos* of the symbolic with speculation on the history of language concerning the progressive assertion of relational elements over basic elements.

Resulting from this exemplary case are informative interactions between Cassirer's philosophical approach and his reading of the linguistic research. As a first step, Cassirer attempts to take account of the meticulous methodological debates from linguistics by reformulating the critical point from a perspective familiar to him from the philosophy of science, and as such by returning to his epistemo-critical works. It now seems to him to be an almost classically realist misunderstanding of the conceptual means of cognition to understand the so-called roots, which are defined as structural elements of the analysis of specific languages, as actually existing elements of an earlier language. Cassirer expresses this consideration on Sheet 51, with the title "Language. Root, Root-Theory," by analogy to the developments familiar to him from the natural sciences: "Prior to the particular discussion a general methodological consideration. – The concept of the 'root' has undergone in linguistics a similar development and had a similar fate to something like the concept of the atom in the field of matter – Indeed, both stem from the same necessity of thought, from the demand for *αἰτία* – The Greek grammarians, alongside those from India, sought the *ρίζωματα* of words, just as the Greek physicists sought the roots and 'grounds,' or in atomism the simple 'elements,' of things ... Recent physics has gradually succeeded in stripping these elements of their character as things (cf. *Substance and Function*). So also quite gradually in linguistics: the roots no longer as real primordial components, but as expressions for constitutive structural relations" (Sheet 51, p. 1). It comes as no surprise that Cassirer later ascribes this insight to Humboldt himself as well, so that he does not unnecessarily expose an author who is so significant for his approach to an obvious criticism.<sup>225</sup>

Nonetheless, the consequences of Cassirer's reading of the linguistic debate concerning roots are by no means limited to such an epistemo-critical reflection on the philosophy of science. Rather, they also pertain to the conception of the

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of roots entirely (Pott, *Etymological Researches [Etymologische Forschungen]*,<sup>2</sup> II, 1, 1861, pp. 193 ff.)" (Wundt 1904a, pp. 595 f., n. 1).

<sup>225</sup> Cf. *ECW* 16, pp. 129 f., with reference to Humboldt (1999, p. 96), and *ECW* 11, pp. 233 f., without documentation. Admittedly, Humboldt is not unambiguous on this point; thus, cf. also Humboldt (1999, pp. 70–72).

genesis of the symbolic that plays such a central role in the early stages of Cassirer's work on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." As already shown in the context of his engagement with Wundt's naturalistic conception of the genesis, Cassirer's shift from explaining the symbolic from its natural conditions towards the unfolding of its potential that is given from the beginning occasionally gives the impression of being a simple prediction of a teleological historical development. And this impression is certainly strengthened by Cassirer's momentary attempt to connect the unfolding of the symbolic in the field of language with the historical interpretation of roots and the development towards inflection. However, this very attempt ultimately forces Cassirer, in line with his reading of the linguistic debate, once again to secure philosophically his conception of the genesis and the *telos*: the linguistic critique of the historical interpretation of language typology demands that the genesis and the *telos* of the symbolic not be understood as descriptions of any historical development that could be verified by way of example through empirical discoveries from linguistics. Rather, what already emerged above in the context of his engagement with Wundt continues to hold true: the conception of the genesis of the symbolic accentuates the potential for its unfolding and determines its *telos* through "emancipation from sensory immediacy." However, it neither anticipates any determinate historical development nor identifies one form of symbolization or one language type as its sole aim. The symbolic unfolds into a variety of forms and is therefore only acquainted with a multifaceted *telos*.

In this sense, Cassirer is attempting to link up with the linguistic debate concerning the concept of roots in his methodological deliberations on Sheet 51. He now interprets roots as "expressions for constitutive structural relations" that provide information concerning the linguistic expression of relations: "And taken in this sense, they can in fact also guide us here. – The question of whether they constitute an independent historical existence does not need to mislead us: but in roots, as depicted, e. g., in etymological dictionaries, we uncover characteristic connections of description and significance. And now arises the philosophical question: can we extract from these particular connections something universal concerning the tendency and direction of language-formation; concerning the mode of its progress from the universal to the particular, concerning the progressive articulation in which 'language' emerges for us" (Sheet 51, pp. 1f.). This "philosophical question" is set apart from the speculation into the history of language that had long been bound up with the concept of roots. However, it by no means abandons the intention of inquiring into the "tendency and direction of language-formation" that is characteristic of Cassirer's perspective on the genesis of the symbolic in the records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." This "tendency" and "direction" should admittedly no longer

be misunderstood as a simple historical teleology, but rather characterize the potential for “emancipation from sensory immediacy” that is constantly given in the diversity of symbolic forms.

The brief connection of Cassirer's view of the genesis of the symbolic with Humboldt's speculation on the history of language has proved to be quite productive in this respect. At the least, it has established connections to the research of the cultural sciences that involve a certain obligation and make it necessary for philosophical reflection to prove itself in the context of empirical and historical discoveries. In the framework of the question concerning the philosophical significance of research in the cultural sciences, namely, what matters first and foremost is the latter – that a bridge be constructed that proves to be productive insofar as it entails further research, demands further differentiation, and can potentially even force revisions. The material of the cultural sciences by no means serves only as evidence for a completely independent philosophical reflection. It also provides an empirical resistance, in which context the philosophical terminology has to be identified, put to the test, and refined.

## Language, Matter, and Form

Nonetheless, the linguistic debate concerning the historical interpretation of roots by no means contributed only to Cassirer's more precise construal of his conception of the genesis of the symbolic by shifting it more clearly away from the idea of a teleological historical development. He was simultaneously obliged to get a more precise grasp on the *telos* of the symbolic by rethinking the role of the so-called material and formal aspects in Humboldt's characterization of inflection and to apprehend the relationship of language to form anew. It is the identification of the dynamic form of language that allows Cassirer to separate himself decisively from Humboldt's concept of form and simultaneously to conceptualize his understanding of the potential for the unfolding of the symbolic.

The difference between “matter” and “form” is closely connected to Humboldt's discussion of the various language types, because he distinguishes the “designation” of a concept or object from its “transposition” into a “determinate category of thought” or language, understanding the former as a material element and the latter as a formal element of language. However, he does not attribute this formal element to all languages in equal measure. That is, in Humboldt, this formal element depends essentially on whether the linguistic categories are actually highlighted in word- and sentence-formation and thus expressed phonetically. As a result, he understands isolating languages like Chinese as form-

less, because the grammatical categories and syntactic relations have no vocal equivalent in word- and sentence-formation. In contrast, inflected languages establish a union between material and formal moments by allowing these relations to enter into the vocal unity of the word or sentence in which, however, they simultaneously remain recognizably distinct. Inflection is thus the paradigm of the analysis and synthesis of material and formal elements, as Cassirer also characterizes the “peculiar advantage of inflected languages” in Humboldt.<sup>226</sup>

In terms of the linguistic critique of language typology and the thesis of a development from “formless” to inflecting languages, however, Humboldt’s concept of form turns out to be dubious. In his notes, Cassirer does not merely record the critique of his “value scale” of languages,<sup>227</sup> but also that of the tenuous differentiation of language types, and in particular of the assumption of a “formless language.”<sup>228</sup> As such, he will also not hesitate to draw the conclusion that we should not distinguish between “formless” and formed languages, but that language should rather be understood in principle as a form. In the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer pursues this thesis without further ado by beginning with the widespread view, shared by Humboldt, but also by Wundt, that the elementary linguistic unit is the proposition and not

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**226** Thus, after Cassirer has introduced Humboldt’s distinction between subjective and objective roots, he explains: “According to Humboldt, the peculiar advantage of inflected languages consists in the fact that in them these two acts of linguistic consciousness [the ‘designation of the concept’ and the ‘transposition of the same into a determinate category of thought,’ A.S.] also present themselves outwardly in clear separation, – that they are distinguished from one another, but on the other hand that they do not simply remain alongside one another, but rather join together into one unitary linguistic structure, into the synthetic unity of the word. In all inflection we see how a particular ‘objective’ basis for significance, which is expressed in the ‘material root,’ is established, but also how it is simultaneously modified in accordance with the particular relations that were designated by the pronominal root” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 152).

**227** “Modern linguistic research has repeatedly modified these views by Humboldt, both individually and as a whole, and primarily has increasingly forgone the establishment of a unitary logical value scale along which language and its basic types are supposed to be ordered” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 155).

**228** “Older linguistic theory still assumed, among the various types that it distinguished, a purely isolating type that was still supposed to stand in immediate proximity to the ‘pure language of roots’ and for which Chinese in particular was often cited as a concrete historical example. [References in the note: Humboldt (1999, p. 100) and Müller (1888, p. 385), A.S.] But just as the sharp distinction between isolating, assimilating, inflected, and agglutinative languages in general has gradually broken down in light of empirical historical research, so too did the notion of an absolutely formless language have to be abandoned” (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 158f.).

the word.<sup>229</sup> Namely, he does not merely view that thesis as establishing the primacy of the whole over the parts, both of the proposition over the word and of the language over the proposition, but also immediately infers from this fact the “formedness” of everything linguistic: “Here too, language proves to be an organism in which, according to the well-known Aristotelian definition, the whole is prior to its parts. Language begins with a complex total expression that only gradually breaks down into its elements [*Elemente*], into relatively independent subsidiary units. As far back as we can trace it, language always already presents itself as a formed unity. None of its manifestations can be understood as a mere togetherness of individual material significant sounds, rather in each of them we likewise encounter determinations that serve purely the expression of the *relation* between the individual elements [*Einzelemente*] and that structure and nuance this relation itself in a variety of ways” (*ECW* 11, p. 281).

This description is evidently oriented on the analysis of inflection, although this point is only mentioned explicitly in a note.<sup>230</sup> However, it does pertain to languages in general, which is why Cassirer also immediately addresses the possible objection that this description does not apply to the traditional counter-model to the isolating languages, which according to Humboldt are formless. Based on more recent literature in linguistics and in a similar manner to the manuscript from 1919, he does not merely marshal against this anticipated objection doubts in principle concerning the typology of languages.<sup>231</sup> Primarily, he demonstrates by reference to Chinese that, precisely in this alleged “formlessness,” in a “seemingly resistant material, that that forceful power of form has imprinted itself most energetically and with the greatest clarity,” because the grammatical and syntactic relations are not expressed by sounds at all, but rather by a strict word order (*ECW* 11, p. 283).<sup>232</sup> Thus, just as the apparently pure material

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**229** Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 280f. Cassirer refers explicitly to Humboldt (1999, pp. 70f. and 128), and in a note to Wundt, though in this case admittedly without any information as to the passage in question. Implicitly, he may – as on Sheet 46, p. 4 – be referring, e.g., to Wundt (1904a, p. 596).

**230** *ECW* 11, p. 281, n. 4: “And even in *inflected languages* we often find vestiges of an archaic state in which the boundaries between sentence and word were quite fluid.”

**231** *ECW* 11, p. 284, does not merely reference the serious differences within one linguistic type, but also – as already in the manuscript from 1919 – the fact that the differences among the types have “gradually broken down in light of empirical historical research.”

**232** In this passage, Cassirer refers to Humboldt, whereby he can avoid a critique that is all too abrupt and one-sided: “For the isolation of words from one another is far from subverting the content [*Gehalt*] and ideal sense of the sentence form – as long as the different logical-grammatical relationships of individual words are clearly expressed in the *word order* [*Wortstellung*], without recourse to phonetic changes in the words themselves. This medium of word order [*Wortstellung*], which Chinese has developed to the highest consistency and sharpness, might

elements are already bound up with formal elements in this case, Cassirer also views the formal elements of inflected language as being bound up with material elements, since in the history of language the inflected suffixes have usually emerged from objective designations.<sup>233</sup> Consequently, matter and form cannot be distinguished purely in any language, but are rather unified in all languages.<sup>234</sup> Thus, Cassirer views a synthesis of these elements as being accomplished in the proposition per se, a synthesis which determines not least the object of the expression. Concrete languages, however, relate these two aspects of linguistic symbolization to one another each in its own way and thereby develop, according to Cassirer, a specific “form” in each case.<sup>235</sup>

The linguistic critique of the alleged formlessness of languages consisting merely of “formless root-concepts” plays in this case into the hands of Cassirer’s reflection on the philosophy of language and the symbol (Humboldt 1999, p. 71). As Cassirer has already emphasized continually, both in his interpretation of Kant and in his theory of the concept, form and matter can never be separated.

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indeed, from a purely logical point of view, be regarded as the only truly adequate medium of expressing grammatical relationships. For just as relationships, which themselves, so to speak, possess no proper representative substrate of their own but merge into pure relations; so it would seem possible to designate them more certainly and more clearly by the mere relation [*Relation*] that expresses itself in position than through their own words and phonic constructions. In this sense, Humboldt, who in general regarded the inflected languages as the manifestation of the complete, ‘pure lawful form’ of language, said that the essential advantage of Chinese lay in the consistency with which it carried out the principle of inflectionlessness” (*ECW* 11, p. 283). Cassirer refers somewhat later to Humboldt (1999, pp. 230 ff. and 255 f.).

**233** Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 284–286.

**234** According to Cassirer, the formal and the material element should not be separated, but rather distinguished as “series member” and “series form,” and they can be characterized as the “objective” categorization of the given or the “subjective spontaneity” of the “thinking spirit”: “Naturally, the two cannot be separated absolutely: because already in the individual intuition (‘tree’) there are indeed formal categories – even in such a ‘material’ content as ‘green’ we find comparison and differentiation (series attribution  $\rho$ -element). At any rate, however, we can distinguish series member from series form; Humboldt gives the first as a designation of the concept and to that extent as objective, the second as subjective [in the Kantian sense of spontaneity! Categorization into a class – relation to the whole of thought, to the thinking spirit!] For more precision on this subject, see the targeted passages, pp. 110f.” (Sheet 54, p. 1).

**235** “By its very form, every sentence, even the so-called simple sentence, embodies the possibility of such an inner organization and contains the demand of such an organization. This can take place, however, in very different degrees and stages. The force of synthesis may at one moment outweigh that of analysis – or conversely, the analytical force of separation may attain a relatively high development [*Ausbildung*] without that it conforms to the combination [*Zusammenfassung*] of an equally strong force. What we call the ‘form’ of each specific language originates in the dynamic interaction and tension between the two forces” (*ECW* 11, pp. 286 f.).

This position in epistemology and the philosophy of science, however, was supposed to find a correlate in the philosophy of the symbolic and language, because Cassirer ultimately understands Humboldt's view of word-formation in inflected languages as a further development of Kant's conception of the objective representation [*Vorstellung*] into the philosophy of the symbolic.<sup>236</sup> The synthesis of formal-subjective and substantial-material elements in the proposition thus takes up once again the Kantian synthesis in judgment, in which context the appeal to Wundt's differentiation of linguistic "basic" and "relational elements" is by no means unhelpful.<sup>237</sup> What Cassirer, at first still following Humboldt's text closely, records on Sheet 54 with respect to the "designation of the concept" and the "transposition into a determinate category of thought," he thus relates parenthetically to the Kantian relation between intuition and the categories of the understanding: "a) – the  $\sigma$ -element – material, b) the  $\rho$ -element – formal. To be developed in dependence on Kant, as here on Humboldt, a) materially present intuition (impression), b) formal categorization, formation via the category" (Sheet 54, p. 1).<sup>238</sup> On the one hand, this adaptation demonstrates how Cassirer, following in the footsteps of Humboldt, transforms the Kantian model of experience and cognition into a philosophy of the symbolic. On the other hand, he avails himself to that end of Humboldt's analysis of inflection and simultaneously transforms it into a universal interpretation of language in terms of the philosophy of the symbolic: the designation of the concept and its transposition into a

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**236** "Now we recognize more clearly the fact that, in the whole development of language, the 'subjective' component does not merely approach the given 'objective' component, that the 'form' does not simply supervene on the matter, but rather that the former constitutes a constitutive presupposition for the latter and for its linguistic intuition and designation. Every designation of something 'objective' is already its transposition into a determinate categorial context. As we can see, we are dealing here with a repetition and renewal of that basic relation between 'matter' and 'form' that Kant had identified for the whole field of cognition. The form is rooted in the subject; but it is the subject himself who first produces, by virtue of his spontaneity, every determination of what is given materially, all of its classification into fixed contexts and orderings of intuition and thought, and thereby its genuinely 'objective' significance and validity. Thus, following Humboldt, we reassemble the basic elements of objective consciousness into the basic elements of linguistic consciousness" (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 153f.).

**237** "But quite apart from such theoretical constructions, Humboldt's distinction between the material and formal elements of language remains unaltered in terms of its purely descriptive significance as a running theme of language formation. It recurs, in an expression only slightly altered, in the distinction established in linguistic psychology between basic and relational elements" (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 155).

**238** This Kantian version of the concept of form will also enable Cassirer to understand Humboldt's conception of the inner form of language in accordance with the model of Kant's concept of form; cf., e.g., *ECW* 16, pp. 126f.

grammatical category, but also into the syntactic position of the word in the sentence, thus provide the model for the capacity of language in general for symbolization.

The generalization of the concept of form to all languages, each of which puts the inseparable, but nevertheless distinguishable “material” and “formal elements” into relation in its own specific way, however, ultimately results in the philosophical concept of form having to encompass the potential for all possible forms of linguistic symbolization. This multifaceted potential of language, that of shaping itself into a particular form, emerges with particular clarity in Cassirer’s texts everywhere that the repeated opposition of linguistics makes it necessary to abandon every overly simplistic teleology and instead to emphasize, in accordance with the conception of the genesis, the potential for the unfolding of the symbolic. Language is comprehended in terms of a process of formation. Therefore, however, its dynamic form encompasses a variety of forms.

Cassirer develops the observation that the form of language, as the potential for the unfolding of languages, has to be more extensive, and to that extent more powerful, but also less determinate, when compared to the various concrete languages and their particular rules in a passage from the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, as well as in a mostly parallel passage in the manuscript from 1919.<sup>239</sup> In the context of considering various forms of representing the “ego concept,” Cassirer touches on, among other things, the verb, which is capable of representing the ego to the extent that it portrays an event as the activity of a subject.<sup>240</sup> Cassirer shows himself to be all the more receptive to this depiction of the ego since it designates the active and involved ego, a point which must seem quite attractive from the standpoint of the idealist tradition that includes Cassirer.<sup>241</sup> At the same time, this way of depicting the ego concept, which is ultimately supposed to lead beyond language to Kant’s transcendental ego,<sup>242</sup> is bound up with the “advantage” of inflection, which is not only capable of distinguishing sharply between verbs and nouns, but also of attaining a “pure-

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**239** Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 212–248, as well as *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 165–168.

**240** Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 214f. and 232f. For Cassirer, thus, we are not dealing with the “correlative spheres of intuition” or the “determination of the I-world” and the “world of objects,” but rather with “independent means that serve the pure development and configuration of this other ‘subjective’ existence” (*ECW* 11, p. 212).

**241** Admittedly, Cassirer connects this idealist emphasis on activity with Ludwig Noiré’s thesis of the emergence of language from the experience of one’s own activity and thereby gives it – after stripping away the context of the question of the origin of language – an appropriately concrete, pragmatic meaning; cf. *Manuscript* 1919, pp. 90–99, and *ECW* 11, pp. 257–262.

**242** Cf. *ECW* 11, p. 233.



ly personal configuration of verbal action” beyond conjugating the verb and adding pronouns (*ECW* 11, p. 247).<sup>243</sup> On the other hand, however, there inevitably arises the insight that this is by no means necessary, because the differentiated development of the verb, or even its primacy, is not present either in the beginnings or in the goals of linguistic evolution. Instead, what matters is to take into account a multilayered set of multifaceted phenomena and possible developments between verbs and nouns, without hoping for a straightforward order or a simple teleology.<sup>244</sup>

In light of the differentiation of predominantly verbal or nominal language types, each of which contain verbal and nominal elements, but give them different weights within that relationship, Cassirer reasons: “And it can be expected from the beginning that, faced with this question, an entirely simple *a priori* verdict will not be possible. If language is no longer apprehended as an unambiguous picture [*Abbild*] of an unambiguously given reality, but rather as a vehicle of that great process of the ‘confrontation’ [*Auseinandersetzung*] between I and world, in which the boundaries of both are positively first separated, it is evident that this task harbors in itself a wealth of diverse possible solutions. For the medium in which the mediation takes place certainly does not exist from the beginning in finished determinacy; rather, it is, and takes effect, only in that it configures itself. In this sense, it is not possible to speak of a linguistic system of categories or of an order and sequence of linguistic categories that is understood to include the setting-up of a number of fixed forms in which, as in a prescribed track, all linguistic development must once and for all take its course. As in an epistemo-critical consideration, each individual category, which we single out and place in relief against the others, can, in fact, only be apprehended and assessed as a single motive, which may develop very different concrete individual configurations according to the relations into which it enters with other motives. The ‘form’ of language, which is not, however, to be taken as a form of being but as a form of movement, not as a static form but as a dynamic one, results from the interpenetration [*Ineinander*] of these motives and from their different relationships in which they come together [*zueinander*]” (*ECW* 11, pp. 237f.).

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**243** Cf. the whole passage, *ECW* 11, pp. 247f.

**244** Thereby, Cassirer undertakes a “critical rectification in the *framing of the question* itself” in the old dispute concerning the primacy of the verb or the noun, one that he develops out of his epistemo-critical reflection on the concept of roots discussed above: just like thing and property in knowledge, noun and verb have to be comprehended as correlative elements in language; cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 233–237, and the quoted formulation in *ECW* 11, p. 236. With his argumentation, Cassirer takes a stand against both the primacy of the verb in the history of language according to Noiré and the primacy of the noun in the psychology of language according to Wundt.

This description is extraordinarily noteworthy in several respects. Cassirer responds to the predictable linguistic critique of a model for language in general that takes particular languages as its standard with the admission that philosophical reflection has no authority to make decisions concerning empirical phenomena. However, what at first glance might resemble a retreat from the empirical elements of languages to, as it were, an *a priori* framework for language produces an entirely different consequence. That is, Cassirer by no means wants to avoid commitment to the empirical differentiations of linguistics, even if they all too often prove to be decidedly fragile. Moreover, he is once again emphasizing here the fact that all these questions concerning the structures and differences of languages can only be apprehended in terms of their empirical unfolding and that philosophical reflection has to take its point of departure therefrom. It is nevertheless significant that the genesis of language encompasses all the possibilities that languages are capable of realizing as they unfold, and so philosophical reflection has to work out this potential and emphasize the variety of forms in its realizations. The form of language and languages is therefore dynamic. It, like the genesis of the symbolic in general, does not designate a state and has no concrete form as its *telos*, but is rather found constantly in a state of becoming and unfolds into all sorts of forms. Languages are forms, and to that extent they become form.

This argument should be understood primarily against the backdrop of Humboldt, from whom it simultaneously distances itself decisively. In Humboldt, the unfolding of language could at first only be a development from the formless to the formed languages of inflection – but for Cassirer every language constitutes a form that is composed of relational and basic elements. In the passage from the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* consulted here, thus, what matters most to him is the differentiation of word classes. Cassirer, however, does not understand even the undifferentiated nature of word classes like nouns and verbs as “formlessness,” but rather as the potential for developing a “form”: “If we are inclined to regard such phenomena as proof of the ‘formlessness’ of a language, should we not rather regard it as evidence of the characteristic ‘becoming toward form.’ For it is precisely in the indeterminacy that still adheres to language here, in the lack of formation [*Ausbildung*] and separation of its individual categories, that there is found, rather, a moment of its proper plasticity and its essential inner force of formation” (*ECW* 11, p. 240). This “plasticity” of language, however, does not have any individual language type like inflection as its *telos*. It encompasses the possible unfoldings of language in all its fullness and ultimately describes the potential for its unfolding as unbound by any directed development. The genesis of language should be understood as “becoming towards form,” namely as a progressive differentiation that makes possible a more precise deter-

mination of linguistic expressions and their objects.<sup>245</sup> The more indeterminate a linguistic expression is, however, the more possibilities for its further determination and unfolding it seems to encompass: "The determinateless expression still intrinsically contains all the potentialities of determination and leaves it, as it were, to the further development of particular languages which of these potentialities it will determine" (*ECW* 11, p. 240).

This thesis initially refers to those linguistic phenomena that seem to Cassirer, as well as to the linguists that he consults, to be "formless," and whose progressive differentiation could be evoked by comparison to inflected languages in particular. It is, however, of greater consequence insofar as all languages are nothing other than dynamic forms and, like the genesis of the symbolic as such, should be apprehended solely in the state of their becoming and by reference to their further unfolding. Determinacy and indeterminacy therefore hardly appear suitable for distinguishing "undeveloped" from "more developed" languages.<sup>246</sup> Rather, they characterize a "becoming towards form" that carries out further differentiations in the unfolding of its possibilities, one that simultaneously rejects other possibilities and thereby has to accept de-differentiations [*Entdifferenzierungen*] in comparison with other languages. The continued differentiation that Cassirer links with the motto of "becoming towards form" thus has as its *telos* the unfolding of greater determinacy, a *telos* that Cassirer shares with the idealist tradition. If the "path that language takes" is "the path toward determination," then it nevertheless includes all possible bifurcations, intersections, and divisions of languages, both on this side and that of inflection (*ECW* 11, p. 238).

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**245** "Thus, it is to be expected that the path that language takes, the path toward [zu] determination, is one that is gradually and steadily worked out and configured from a relatively indeterminate stage" (*ECW* 11, p. 238). In *ECW* 11, pp. 238–240, Cassirer invokes evidence from the history of language for an increasing differentiation of word types, primarily of nouns and verbs.

**246** This conceptual redeployment should be borne in mind when Cassirer, for example, takes up the problematic difference between "developed cultural languages" and the "languages of natural peoples" (*ECW* 11, p. 262). What is disconcerting today may in 1920 have been an ordinary and widespread way of speaking, particularly in the literature studied by Cassirer. It is, however, significant that Cassirer does not attach any devaluation of "natural peoples" to this difference, but rather here too – as always – emphasizes the potential for the unfolding of the symbolic; by way of example, cf. Cassirer's disassociation from Steintal's disparaging "discussion of the counting methods of the Mandingos" in *ECW* 11, p. 188.

## The Diversity of Language and the Preconditions of the Concept

Following the determination of the genesis of language as becoming-form, which does not have any particular form of language as its *telos*, there arises the presumption that the language type of inflection may have lost any special position in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. However, reading the work undoubtedly indicates that, although in Cassirer, inflection no longer, as it does in Humboldt, enjoys the advantage, particularly in contrast to the isolating languages, of having a form at its disposal, it nevertheless by no means loses its privileged position with respect to other languages completely. Rather, following Cassirer's alteration of the concept of form, it is distinguished by the fact that it does not merely, like any other language, bring together formal and material elements, but rather synthesizes them in a particular manner. Once again borrowing closely from Humboldt, Cassirer explains this "advantage of inflected languages"<sup>247</sup> in the manuscript from 1919 as follows: "No language can truly do without one of these elements; but individual language groups do differ in terms of how, in terms of the cohesiveness and intimacy with which, they form into one the opposing factors, which are nevertheless necessarily related to one another. In isolating languages, there still prevails here an 'apart-from-one-another,' in 'agglutinative' languages an alongside-one-another, while the true in-one-another is attained only in inflected languages."<sup>248</sup> In the subsequent example – borrowed

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<sup>247</sup> *Manuscript 1919*, p. 152.

<sup>248</sup> *Manuscript 1919*, p. 154. All of this can also be found already on Sheet 54, pp. 2f.: "Meaning of inflection: the substantial 'significance' of the ingredient that is originally present gradually disappears: it becomes merely the bearer, a mere sign of the 'category,' cf. 112f.; the accretion not mechanical, but rather a merging-into-one-another of the material and formal element: only this is true inflection (113), other languages proceed more by way of composition (agglutination) 114f., 118. Accreted syllables as relation to the categories of speech (116); this should indicate a mental inclination, not designate a concept (object, thing) (117). Now we can also break up the proposition into its parts, because every word, even when isolated, already bears its stamp, does not fall out from the relation to it. It is different in the polysynthetic languages: they have to hold the proposition together schematically in a tenuous manner (cf. p. 119.) – In more detail 143ff.! The method of inflection as the highest, as the only one that confers on the word a genuine inner cohesiveness to the mind and the ears and simultaneously casts asunder the parts of the proposition with certainty (162). Chinese lacks all such relational signs (241); it indicates all forms of grammar in the broadest sense by way of position (271), 272 [this line segues into the marginal remarks, which are not quoted here, A.S.]. The method of inflection is the relatively highest, the 'purely lawful' form, see pp. 250 – 253; even 254 calls the inflected the 'only correct,' cf. 256f., 275, the 'solely lawful.' Characterization of semitic languages 259ff., exclusively grammatical use of vowels in semitic languages (261). Thus, a quite noteworthy dis-

from Humboldt – concerning Mexican, therefore, Cassirer demonstrates that form and matter are found together in this polysynthetic language as well, even if in not quite as profound a manner as in inflected languages.<sup>249</sup>

Cassirer also speaks of and clarifies such an “advantage of inflected languages” with reference to Humboldt in later texts.<sup>250</sup> In the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer adds that the inflected languages do not merely bring about a particularly profound unity of formal and material elements, but also *simultaneously* maximize the analysis by way of the synthesis. They thus synthesize the two elements in the unity of the word and that of the proposition, but simultaneously preserve and highlight their difference – in which context they also remain able to develop this property in various ways:<sup>251</sup> “Word-unity itself already contains here, as it were, an inner tension and its reconciliation [*Ausgleichung*] and overcoming. The word is constructed from two distinct, yet at the same time insolubly interlinked and interrelated elements. One component that only serves the objective designation of the concept confronts here another whose sole function is to displace the word in a determinate category of thinking, to characterize it as a ‘substantive,’ ‘adjective,’ ‘verb,’ as a ‘subject’ or direct or indirect object [*Objekt*]. The index of relation, by virtue of which the individual word is connected with the totality of the sentence, is no longer attached here to the word from without, but fuses with it and becomes one of its constitutive elements [*Elemente*]. [Note omitted, A.S.] The differentiating into the word and the integrating into the sentence form correlative methods that join together into a single strictly uniform achievement” (*ECW* 11, pp. 287 f.). The proximity to Humboldt can be recognized in these sentences, even in the particular formulations.

With this characterization of inflected languages, Cassirer, in accordance with Humboldt, is emphasizing the fact that the “formal” and “material elements” are not amalgamated here, but rather synthesized, without leveling the difference between them. More precisely, we are dealing in this sense with an articulated synthesis of material and formal elements, in which the structured

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tribution of matter and form here, in that matter is expressed entirely through consonants, form purely through vowels (cf. 261 [parenthesis remain unclosed, A.S.].”

**249** Cf. *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 161–165, with reference to Humboldt (1999, pp. 131 ff.). More precisely, the example is located in Humboldt (1999, pp. 129 f.). In *ECW* 11, pp. 244 f., Cassirer takes up the same example once again, though admittedly in an abbreviated manner, and apparently interprets it in the same way.

**250** Alongside the passages from the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* cited in the following, cf. also *ECW* 16, pp. 126–129.

**251** Thus writes Cassirer in a remark in *ECW* 11, pp. 287 f., n. 16.

unity is also actually expressed linguistically and vocally in the word and the proposition. Therein, Cassirer sees a necessary condition for reflection on the accomplishment of symbolization and the linguistic relations that confer meaning on what is symbolized: “The development of linguistic consciousness, however, points in the same direction as that of logical consciousness. The richer and subtler the language becomes, the more the pure relational elements appear as the genuine bearers of its characteristic shaping. It is not that individual objective representations [*Vorstellungen*] are designated by mere words, but rather, in the proposition, a meaning that is more unitary in terms of mere representations [*Vorstellungen*], but which is no longer tangible at all, presents itself as a complex of the most diverse conceptual relations and attributions” (*Manuscript 1919*, pp. 157 f.).<sup>252</sup>

In this quotation, it becomes clear why Cassirer, as before, takes such great interest in inflection: he sees a markedly close connection between the synthesis and analysis of material and formal elements in the inflected languages and the accomplishments of the scientific concept according to his epistemo-critical writings.<sup>253</sup> The development of knowledge, as he had analyzed it in *Substance and Function*, thus runs parallel to the unfolding of language, as Cassirer explains in the manuscript from 1919, relying on Sheet 51: “The relation of the linguistic element to the linguistic whole, from whichever side it is considered, everywhere confirms the general relation that logic and epistemo-criticism discover between what they designate as the material and the formal element. Just as here the material, like the mere ‘matter’ of knowledge, never for itself confronts or opposes the form as something absolutely other and external, but is rather only a limit-concept that cognition itself creates for itself in order to designate the ultimate determinable, which, however, implies the demand for determination and thus a relation to it – thus, in the linguistic, as in all spiritual forms whatsoever, there is a determinacy of elements only by way of the fact that the element too preserves within itself and represents one specific ‘structure,’ that it preserves and represents the form of the whole” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 160).

Consequently, on Cassirer’s view, the “advantage of inflected languages” is defined first and foremost by their proximity to the scientific concept. Cassirer

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<sup>252</sup> On the proposition as a “correlate of judgment,” cf. also *Manuscript 1919*, p. 212.

<sup>253</sup> This notion is pervasive from the first sheets on the project of a “Philosophy of the Symbolic” through the publication of the work: already on Sheet 54, p. 2, Cassirer notes, with reference to Humboldt (1999, p. 11): “Meaning of inflection: the substantial ‘significance’ of the ingredient that is originally present gradually disappears: it becomes merely the bearer, a mere sign of the ‘category,’ cf. 112f.” And in *ECW* 11, p. 285, he concludes: “Only through this application of suffixes was the soil prepared for the linguistic designation of pure concepts of relation.”

depicts the linguistic beginnings of concept-formation, both in the manuscript from 1919 as well as in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, as a formation of word-series by means of identical suffixes, as, by way of example, in the “Indo-European titles of family relationships” for father and mother, brother, sister, and daughter.<sup>254</sup> Therein, Cassirer sees an “endeavor to posit a stricter relationship between sound and signification, so that a specific series of conceptual significations is assigned to a specific phonetic series as its correspondence [*Entsprechung*]” (*ECW* 11, p. 266). This “serial formation of language”<sup>255</sup> thus runs parallel in the formation of words and of concepts and relates sound-series and significance-series to one another, without necessarily forming a generic concept – like relatedness – and making the law of this series explicit. Cassirer thus links his theory of the concept of series with Humboldt’s basic idea of the “designation of related concepts by related sounds” and sees in the word-series the occasion for inquiring into the law that forms it, which since the  $\tau\acute{\iota} \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota$  of Socrates is supposed to have led to the development of the reflective concept (Sheet 56, p. 1).<sup>256</sup> This scientific, and no longer linguistic, concept ultimately represents a “genetic definition” from which conceptual connections can be “derived” or “constructed.”<sup>257</sup>

As such, it becomes even clearer why Cassirer, borrowing from Humboldt’s analysis of inflection, sees in sound the “physical condition” of the scientific concept: because of the fact that the formation of word-series in accordance with a phonetic schema and their being attributed [*Zuordnung*] to a significance-series in terms of the phonetic structure of the words realizes the relations that simultaneously determine the linguistic development of objects, scientific concept-formation begins here on the foundation of relations and series. The sensory “material” is thus – according to Cassirer’s explanations, which give evidence of his proximity to Humboldt even in his word choice – virtually permeated by the formal relations of language, which are increasingly supposed to determine its meaning, to the point that it, as it were, merges into its symbolic function.<sup>258</sup> Thus, according to Cassirer, the “concepts of space, time and num-

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254 Cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 266–269, and the largely analogous *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 190–196.

255 *ECW* 11, p. 268.

256 Cf. *ECW* 11, p. 269.

257 “The analysis of the interconnections of concepts ultimately leads back to their ‘genetic definition’: to the statement of a *principle* out of which they originate, from which they can be derived as its particularizations” (*ECW* 11, p. 269). In *Manuscript 1919*, p. 191, Cassirer speaks here of the “constructive moment.”

258 The “force [of language, A.S.] consists in its ability to configure a determinate given material in different ways, that it is able, without, in the first instance, changing its content, to place

ber,” for example, are “progressively” supposed to “imbue the sensible itself with spiritual content [*Gehalt*] and configure it into a symbol of the spiritual” (*ECW* 11, p. 212). Such a “transposition from the sensible to the ideal,”<sup>259</sup> such a “dematerialization”<sup>260</sup> of the sign, is indeed based on the “physical condition” of sound, but it undergoes a transformation in order to make it into the “bearer” of the linguistic relations that are the sole determinant of the meaning of the expression. Thereby becomes possible, by means of the functionalization of material signs, the “emancipation from sensory immediacy” that essentially takes place in reflection on the symbolic relations in which what at first seemed to be given immediately is determined and represented symbolically.

The “advantage of inflected languages” has thus undergone a decisive shift from Humboldt to Cassirer, because it now no longer designates a privileged position among languages, but rather its particular role for the development of the scientific concept and “relational thinking,” as is clearly expressed once again in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: “Humboldt, and the older philosophers of language, looked upon this state of affairs as proof that truly inflected languages constitute the summit of language formation in general and that in them, and only in them, the ‘pure lawful form’ of language expressed itself in ideal perfection. However, even if we possess a certain reservation and skepticism toward the establishment of such an absolute measure of value, it is obvious that indeed the inflected languages provide a highly important and effective organ for the development of pure relational thinking. The more this thinking progresses, the more determinately it must configure the organization of speech after itself – as, on the other hand, this very organization itself reacts decisively on the form of thinking” (*ECW* 11, p. 288). Because inflected languages allow for and promote reflection on meaning-conveying relations, Cassirer understands them as preconditions of the scientific concept, whose formation on the foundation of lawful series seeks to be rid of the historical contingencies of languages and is thus able to give shape to the logical lawfulness of objective knowledge.

As a result, what is crucial for understanding the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is the fact that inflection represents a sort of vanishing point for the first volume

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this content in the service of another task and thus is able to imprint it with a new spiritual form” (*ECW* 11, p. 169). This language of “force” can easily be recognized as a revival of Humboldt’s way of speaking; by way of example, cf. Humboldt (1999, pp. 25–32).

**259** *ECW* 11, p. 169.

**260** Sheet 16, p. 17. The passage reads in detail: “Thereby, we have found a new, quite deep moment of every symbolic function as such: every sign touches on ‘dematerialization’ – and thereby simply represents ever deeper circles of relations, ever more complex and subtler processes, first making it possible to apprehend such processes” (Sheet 16, pp. 17 f.).



on language. This volume initially deals with “Language in the Phase of Sensible Expression” (Chapter II) and ultimately, by way of “Language in the Phase of Intuitive Expression” (Chapter III), arrives at “Language as the Expression of Conceptual Thinking” (Chapter IV). Apparently, the volume is not merely arranged in accordance with the *telos* of “emancipation from sensory immediacy.”<sup>261</sup> In the “progression” from ostensible sensory immediacy to its constantly advancing permeation via linguistic symbolization, the volume is clearly oriented on the increasing prevalence of “formal” or “relational elements” over “material” or “basic elements” in the linguistic form. Cassirer thus organizes the abundant material that he consults from the linguistic sciences with a eye towards inflection, which – apart from a few scattered mentions – is dealt with only in the last chapter, “Language as the Expression of the Pure Forms of Relation – The Sphere of Judgment and the Concepts of Relation” (Chapter V).<sup>262</sup> As in the manuscript from 1919, it is the transition from word to concept that allows Cassirer to address inflection, and that transition is ultimately oriented on his overall approach to language.

In accordance with the detailed discussion of the genesis of the symbolic and the becoming-form of language in this chapter, this structure of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and its focus on inflection should not be understood as a historical teleology of linguistic evolution. Not least as a result of his perusal of the diverse and disparate material from linguistics and the critical debate concerning Humboldt's speculations on the history of language, Cassirer was determined to reject any such teleology, and in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, as previously in the manuscript from 1919, he emphasizes decisively the irreducibly multifarious character of linguistic systems, which can no more be derived from a theory than apprehended in terms of a one-dimensional historical development.<sup>263</sup> Nevertheless, in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer apparently has inflection in view from the outset, from

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**261** This theme is repeatedly recognizable, primarily in the third chapter; with reference to the expression of space, cf. *ECW* 11, pp. 157–163, of time pp. 172–178, and of number pp. 189–191.

**262** Among the more noteworthy earlier mentions of inflection belongs *ECW* 11, pp. 261 f., n. 13.

**263** “How this connection takes shape in the particular and how diverse are the ways of determining ‘matter’ by way of ‘form’ may, of course, only give one view of the whole diversity of empirical-historical intuition. If the one set of languages revolves around the verb, the other around the noun, if the one seems [...] to advance from the intuition of the act to that of the being, the other from that of the being to that of the act – then all these differences can present and exhibit themselves, if at all, only by way of the closest comparison of the details of the individual languages [note omitted, A.S.]. Within the limits of abstract and general observation, only the necessity of this transition itself can be recognized, while the universality of the various directions in which that transition travels cannot be identified” (*Manuscript 1919*, p. 165).

the genesis of the symbolic in the gesture, through his understanding of the vocal, and up to the unfolding of linguistic symbolizations in subsequent chapters. This is probably a result of the fact that Cassirer is reflecting from the outset on the linguistic conditions of scientific concept-formation, and he therefore shifts the unfolding of the symbolic in language into this quite particular perspective.<sup>264</sup> Consequently, the privileged role of inflection would be justified by the fact that it allows for a bridge to be constructed from language to the concept: inflection realizes the preconditions of the scientific concept in language. Doubtless, this advantage should by no means be underestimated for Cassirer, as an erstwhile theorist of the concept.

This explanation of the role of inflection in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, however, now gives rise to a new perspective on its volume concerning the philosophy of language. If Cassirer's attachment to the Humboldtian advantage of inflected languages is motivated by the fact that he is reflecting on the linguistic preconditions of the scientific concept, then this fits quite well with the thesis of the second chapter of the present study, that Cassirer is not pursuing a deductive, but rather a reflective approach and, following in the footsteps of Kant's third *Critique*, incorporating the simultaneously transcendental and empirical conditions of the symbolic. Accordingly, the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, under the assumption of the scientific concept, is not merely inquiring into the conditions of that concept in language, and thus on this side of knowledge. It also comprehends them as conditions that are simultaneously transcendental and historical, conditions that have to unfold in the genesis of language and languages, and which must therefore be demonstrated in the context of facts taken from empirical research in linguistics. In the inflected languages, we can almost see the empirical proof of how the linguistic conditions are able to unfold to such an extent that they, as it were, stand at the threshold of scientific concept-formation. By presupposing the fact of the scientific concept in order, based on discoveries from the empirical cultural sciences, to demonstrate the unfolding of linguistic conditions required by the concept, however, Cassirer shifts language from the outset into a theoretical perspective. The philosophy of language in the first volume appears, as it were, as a propaedeutic for the theory of the concept taken from the philosophy of language, because it, on the one hand, recovers the linguistic conditions of that concept and, on the other hand, brings the theoretical potential of language into focus.

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**264** The way in which Cassirer imagines scientific concept-formation as developing from linguistic concept-formation can be traced by way of example in *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 187–200, as well as with reference to the concept of number in *Manuscript 1919*, pp. 201–211.

The concept, however, represents only one possibility of the unfolding of language – in addition, based on Cassirer's records on the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," we could mention aesthetic reflection. In all probability, aesthetics was the cultural field that led Cassirer to venture beyond epistemo-criticism, as the first chapter has shown. Moreover, he anticipated it in the *Disposition* and sketched out its possibility by way of the reproductive gesture from the first records on Wundt and in the corresponding passages in the first volume.<sup>265</sup> However, Cassirer apparently does not pursue this possibility further with any consistency, and so art is mentioned almost exclusively in his enumerations of various forms. Aesthetics, however, represents just as much a possibility of the unfolding of language as does the logical concept, as Cassirer makes clear by his structural characterization of language. Namely, Cassirer characterizes language time and time again in terms of its position between logic and aesthetics, as here in the manuscript from 1919: it "stands in a central position of spiritual being, a position in which rays of diverse origin merge together and proceed therefrom into a wide variety of fields in accordance with principles. The mythical and the logical moment, – the direction of aesthetic intuition and that of discursive thought: all of this is resolved in it, without, however, its being merged into one of them. Thus, the more sharply it emerges, the more clearly is the particular lawfulness that is expressed in it sent back once again to the whole system of forms of consciousness and to the unity and universality of the symbolic function as such" (*Manuscript* 1919, p. 234).<sup>266</sup>

This is the conclusion of the manuscript from 1919, which lends all the more weight to the emphasis on the aesthetic as well as the logical possibilities of language. After Cassirer had generalized the concept to the symbolic, he evidently focused in the field of language on its respecification for conceptual reflection and worked out the linguistic preconditions of the scientific concept. However, in so doing, he is merely pursuing one "direction" of the unfolding of the symbolic in language, because he leaves open "the direction of aesthetic intuition." The connections to the unfolding of the aesthetic potential also remain ready to be pursued in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, but they merely highlight the possibility of discussing the linguistic preconditions of aesthetic reflection as well, and thereby of unfolding the becoming-form of language under the auspices of aesthetics. The first volume can therefore hardly

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**265** Once again, on this subject cf. the section "The Genesis of Logic and Art: Wundt's 'Indicative' and 'Imitative Gesture'" in this chapter, pp. 255–262 above.

**266** Similarly, *ECW* 11, p. 273 reads: "Here too, it can be demonstrated that language, as a spiritual total-form, stands on the border between myth and *logos*, and that it also constitutes a midway point and mediation between the theoretical and aesthetic view of the world."

count as Cassirer's completed philosophy of language, but rather merely as one partial volume whose complementary aesthetic part has not been delivered.

The *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, therefore, already demonstrates in its treatment of language just how great a challenge the project of a philosophy of culture presented to Cassirer. Aesthetics constituted an essential impulse for his venturing beyond the theory of the scientific concept and turning initially towards language. Thereby, however, language proves itself to stand under the auspices of the concept, because the linguistic preconditions of that concept are supposed to unfold in it. As such, Cassirer has taken a step beyond the theory of the concept, but it is only a first step, since the *telos* of language is a multi-faceted one and is also acquainted with other directions. Cassirer's philosophy of language thus remains quite incomplete, but his conception of the genesis of the symbolic and the becoming-form of language does highlight the potential of the symbolic beyond this context. The challenges of a philosophy of culture that engages with the cultural sciences will therefore propel Cassirer onwards and continue to endure even today.



## Concluding Remarks

The present study has led to an apparently negative result in its third chapter. According to that discussion, the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* represents, on the one hand, an incomplete philosophy of language since, although Cassirer does consider language to be powerful enough to unfold both in a logical-conceptual and in an aesthetic direction, he actually develops only its logical-conceptual potential. On the other hand, in so doing, Cassirer only takes a first step from the epistemo-critical theory of the concept towards the philosophy of culture, because he does not emphasize the multifaceted cultural potential of language, but rather shifts it into the perspective of the concept in order to unfold the concept's linguistic preconditions. Certainly, I have not demonstrated these limits of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* with the aim of criticizing Cassirer's philosophy of language as it presently exists. Rather, I traced out those limits in order to work out the potential of the approach taken by the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," which does not necessarily appear on every page throughout its implementation. The question of culture that arises in the course of the project also represents a challenge that does not receive any conclusive treatment in the existing volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. A significant clue is provided by the aesthetics that Cassirer envisioned for the new project from the first *Disposition*, but which he nonetheless never carried out.

The productivity of the approach of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," however, can already be seen in the limits of Cassirer's treatment of language as a precondition of scientific concept-formation. Namely, it rests on an understanding of conditions that distinguishes them clearly from an ordinary view of transcendental conditions. In his older epistemo-critical writings, for example, Cassirer himself had postulated the concept merely as a necessary condition of cognition, and thereby, like his Neo-Kantian teachers, strictly avoided any appeal to the Kantian faculties and their psychological-physiological interpretations, such that the conditions of cognition remained curiously placeless. Now, however, with the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," the concept is given a place, since its preconditions are realized in language. In the syntactic-grammatical structures of the inflected languages, they take on a concrete form, and they also include the sensory aspect of sound as a "physical condition." As demonstrated in the third chapter, Cassirer's dependence on Humboldt's analysis of inflection turns out to be rather ambiguous, but it simultaneously demonstrates how Cassirer's reflection on the philosophy of culture seeks to work out the conditions of the

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scientific concept from the empirical description of concrete languages and thereby situates those conditions within the historical unfolding of language.

This understanding of the linguistic preconditions of the concept stands within the Kantian tradition of transcendental reflection, but it develops this reflection decidedly further by reference to the question of culture. Namely, Cassirer's reflection on the philosophy of culture likewise deals with the conditions of our experience. However, it no longer leads back to conditions that are independent from what we are able to experience and that we are therefore able to prescribe authoritatively to all objects, insofar as we experience them. This conception of the conditions of our experience as *a priori* and objective in the sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason* had already been reconfigured by the Neo-Kantian tradition from which Cassirer emerges, to the effect that all conditions are interpreted functionally, and therefore not understood as an inalterable foundation, but rather allowed to develop within the framework of the history of ideas. Cassirer, however, goes a step further by taking up the expansion and deepening of the understanding of conditions that Kant, as explained in the second chapter of the present study, had already sketched out in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The reason is that, with the introduction of the activity of the reflective judgment, novel conditions had to be assumed, conditions that ventured beyond the *a priori* and objective conditions from the *Critique of Pure Reason* in two respects. First, they are not independent of the objects that were necessarily supposed to conform with them, but must rather conform with their objects, being, as it were, read off from those objects and put to the test in that context. Secondly, it is not only possible for these conditions to be transformed thereby, but rather also specified for various types of objects. The third *Critique* and its "First Introduction" are therefore closely bound up with the question of the particular conditions that justify a specific differentiation of forms of knowledge (such as, for example, biology) and thereby go beyond the homogeneous unity of the most universal conditions of cognition. This transcendental reflection thus also includes such conditions, which are presupposed in order to be put to the test in the context of the objects, and which therefore simultaneously characterize specific forms of genuinely empirical knowledge.

Cassirer deals with this expansion and deepening of transcendental reflection historically in his studies on Kant, and he simultaneously makes systematic use of it for his "Philosophy of the Symbolic." The reason is that, on the one hand, Cassirer begins with the fact that the conditions of culture themselves have their place within culture, instead of giving a provisional order to the empirical reality and history of culture. The conditions of our experience have their reality in the historical world of cultural objectivations and the symbolic media in and by means of which they transform and unfold. On the other hand, on Cas-

sirer's view, culture is characterized by its internal diversity and differentiation, such that reflection on the philosophy of culture has to operate in the midst of a conflict between universal and specific conditions in order to do as much justice as possible to the specificity of cultural phenomena. As the first chapter has shown, we can see in this context a central achievement of the *Disposition* for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." It aims at the specification of the symbolic, beginning with the distinctions among symbolic forms – such as, e.g., language or knowledge – and moving onwards to their internal differentiation – of concrete languages or the basic concepts of various disciplines. Cassirer's efforts towards the unity of culture should therefore always be viewed against the backdrop of this decisive emphasis on the specification of symbolic forms and their internal differentiation.

This conception of reflection on the philosophy of culture has far-reaching consequences for Cassirer's project of the "Philosophy of the Symbolic." Namely, the latter itself operates within the precarious situation of the reflective judgment in Kant's sense. Thus, when Cassirer praises Kant's third *Critique*, he is also formulating his own methodological maxim: "Nowhere else than in the particular, as can now be seen, is the function of the 'universal' representable. In this respect, the notion at which the doctrine of the schematism aims found its decisive complement and fulfillment only in the '*Critique of the Power of Judgment*'" (*ECW* 9, p. 211). Consequently, reflection on the philosophy of culture too cannot derive individual phenomena from one assumed universal, nor can it reason immediately on the basis of one homogenous framework of the most universal conditions. Rather, with the help of the concrete phenomena, it must reflect on their universal and specific conditions, which should not be conceived of as independent from these phenomena. Thereby, it simultaneously becomes possible to take into consideration processes of the concrete specification of the symbolic and the reciprocal determination of the conditions and objects of cultural experience.

Moreover, the assumption that the universal can only be apprehended in the context of the particular and that the conditions of our experience should therefore be exhibited in the context of the empirical and historical phenomena of culture leads to the fact that Cassirer always begins "from the 'given,' from the empirically ascertained and secured facts [*Tatsachen*] of cultural consciousness," in order to inquire into their specific conditions (*ECW* 12, pp. 13 f.). These "facts," however, are not simply given. They must specifically be discovered by research, which is not the task of philosophy, but rather of the human and cultural sciences. If Cassirer's reflection on the philosophy of culture begins with concrete and particular, empirical and factual phenomena, then it is therefore building on description carried out by research in the cultural sciences. On Sheet 39, Cassirer addresses this entanglement of reflection and description:



there “remains nothing but to accept the forms, which in any case must happen, first in their factual givenness, and then to analyze them ‘transcendentally.’ We do not deduce the one from the other; rather, we seek descriptively to ascertain their unity, their connection, their progress, and their opposition. For this purpose, we turn to the history of spirit: in art, religion, language, myth, science” (Sheet 39, p. 1). Here, Cassirer sketches out programmatically an interaction between reflection on the philosophy of culture and description in the cultural sciences: he links the description of given phenomena with the question of their specific conditions, because conditions and phenomena can only be determined and specified reciprocally. As such, in Cassirer, transcendental reflection does not lead back to conditions that underlie our experience, but which have no empirical-historical reality of their own. Instead, it leads ahead into the cultural world, into its facticity and its history. In this intertwining of reflection on the philosophy of culture and description in the cultural sciences, Cassirer’s attempt at a “world-bearing thought,” which, according to Ralf Konersmann, is characteristic of the philosophy of culture of the 20th century as a whole, has its own peculiar signature.

Beyond that, Cassirer’s collaboration with the cultural sciences is connected with his emphatic emphasis on the inherent diversity of culture. Namely, he begins with the fact that philosophy can only catch hold of a world that is diverse in its own right, a world of culture and cultures, language and languages, myth and myths, art and the arts, with the help of research in the cultural sciences. Cassirer thus makes methodological use of the insight, already espoused by Dilthey, that the diversity of the disciplines of the human and cultural sciences should be seen as a reaction to an increasingly differentiated world: science could only do justice to this development by way of its own differentiation. For “philosophical contemplation,” the “wealth of material or empirical scientific research” thus represents a challenge that can hardly be overcome (*ECW* 11, p. X). However, it provides the only path for coming to grips with the complexity of culture.

Cassirer’s reflection on the philosophy of culture thus focuses on the diversity of culture and, in so doing, distinguishes itself sharply from the philosophy of Hegel, despite several parallels. The reason is that Cassirer is dealing, as indeed was Hegel, with conditions of experience that have their reality in the cultural objectifications of spirit and which unfold in reciprocal interconnection with the determination of the world itself. However, he decisively rejects the notion of justifying the unfolding and specification of the symbolic by beginning with a conceptual logic. In the *Disposition* from 1917, therefore, under the title “Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” he criticizes the closed logical character of the Hegelian system and seeks in contrast to bring to the fore the “concrete fullness of the

diverse itself” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 31). The unfolding of the symbolic does not conform to any conceptual logic and does not result in a simple, unidirectional series of development. It does not allow for a series of historical stages of development to follow one after the other, but rather continues to preserve developed forms as possibilities. It is acquainted with many directions, as demonstrated in the present study by way of conceptual and aesthetic reflection, and it multiplies its inner richness through every split into specifications and differentiations. For Cassirer, however, the philosophical critique of Hegel’s system by no means precludes the notion that the “concrete fullness of the diverse itself” can only be taken into account when reflection on the philosophy of culture keeps in view the unity within the diversity, considering that unity “in context, in the particularity of specifically diverse symbolic expressions” (*Disposition 1917*, p. 31). Such a systematization of the forms of symbolization, however, no longer stands under the auspices of the philosophical concept, but rather begins with the results of research in the cultural sciences and strives, in reflection on the universal and specific conditions of the symbolic, towards a constantly heuristic and provisional ordering of culture.

Cassirer thus comprehends his approach as a reflective approach in the Kantian tradition and distinguishes it from a deductive aspiration in the sense of the post-Kantian systems. He also, however, distances himself from all sorts of idealism, insofar as he interweaves his reflection on the philosophy of culture closely with the empiricism of research in the cultural sciences. If Cassirer insists on his critical idealism and engages with the cultural sciences like few other philosophers, then here can be seen a decidedly post-Hegelian program: he abandons any claim to a primacy of philosophy and seeks out productive collaboration with the human and cultural sciences that had emerged after Hegel and long since ceased to subordinate themselves to philosophy. The proximities of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture to the cultural sciences are therefore not merely justified systematically by reference to the complexity of the cultural world and his reflective approach in the Kantian tradition. They are also the result of the new historical situation of philosophy in the universities of the 20th century, in which Cassirer apparently saw the chance to draw out philosophical uses from collaboration with the cultural sciences – a point which is by no means self-evident in philosophy even today.

In this respect, it continues to be a worthwhile innovation by Cassirer not to retreat to logic, concepts, and arguments, which, under the impression of the axiomatization of mathematics around 1900, are considered to be independent from empiricism and also not to be in need of it. Such an approach would certainly have been available to Cassirer, as indeed he developed his early theory of the concept in close proximity to and intensive preoccupation with precisely this

recent development of logic and mathematics. Instead, the critique by Richard Höningwald called his attention to the problem that this appeal to the most universal concepts is not sufficient, since they are specified in terms of their applications and must therefore be determined by beginning with the context of application. Moreover, Cassirer inquires into the preconditions of the concept and situates them in the larger context of language and culture. He abandons the philosophical primacy of an apparently pure logic in order to turn instead towards the empiricism of the cultural sciences, and in this way towards the world in terms of its own complexity. The topicality of this approach emerges all the more clearly since even the philosophy of the present day oftentimes hesitates to take up the post-Hegelian challenge of the cultural sciences and instead withdraws to apparently pure concepts and logical arguments. However, this attempt to retreat to the logical analysis of concepts and arguments is likely to meet with indifference from other disciplines. The ambition to instruct other disciplines from the lofty heights of logic is more likely to arouse hostility.

Naturally highlighting the topicality of Cassirer's philosophy of culture does not mean praising this characteristic conjunction of philosophical reflection and empirical description as a panacea. Such a promise may indeed appear seductive in view of the state of philosophy, which seems no less precarious today than in Cassirer's time. However, it is not just that we have yet to consider the development of the cultural sciences in recent decades, which cannot easily be compared with what I, in reference to Cassirer's era, have heuristically called the human and cultural sciences. Beyond that, such a view would also overlook the essential task of discussing the systematic stringency and the heuristic potential of Cassirer's approach in depth and in detail. Likewise, we cannot preach a mere return to Cassirer's philosophy due to the way in which it has been dismissed as outdated as a result of aspects that occasionally seem disconcerting from a present-day perspective. There are primarily two aspects worth mentioning here. A first aspect is bound up with the widespread critique that Cassirer does not develop any rigorous terminology and that his arguments vanish into the richness of the textual material. The present study has attempted to give an answer to this point: this characteristic of Cassirer's philosophizing is essentially a result of the fact that he interweaves philosophical theory-formation with the empiricism of the cultural sciences, and therefore does not refine his concepts solely in their own terms, but rather by reference to the available material. The concept of the genesis of the symbolic, which is mentioned in the title of the present study, represents a paradigmatic example of this fact: it is by no means the thematic focus of Cassirer's outline for the "Philosophy of the Symbolic," but rather unfolds as part of his critique of Wundt's naturalistic conception of the genesis, as well as in connection with Humboldt's linguistic research. If Cassirer

does without a detailed clarification of the concept of the genesis as much as possible, then this might be charged to him as a philosophical defect. It can, however, also be understood as an expression of a way of thinking that links together reflection on the philosophy of culture and the empiricism of the cultural sciences, and which is furthermore too keenly aware of its own historicity to allow it to escape into any apparently purely theoretical discussion.

A second aspect of Cassirer's philosophy of culture may have contributed to the fact that its topicality comes into focus only rarely. Namely, despite all Cassirer's efforts to distinguish his philosophy from the post-Kantian systems, it shares an essential driving force with this tradition of idealism. That is to say, Cassirer does not interweave his philosophical reflection with empirical description with the aim of bringing the culture of the human being, as it were, back to earth in terms of a positivist foundation of facts. Rather, what matters for him is locating the human being on the horizon of his possibilities. The first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* already substantiates this connection in terms of its structure, which envisions a gradual "emancipation from sensory immediacy"<sup>1</sup> and thereby pursues the Hegelian theme of a "spiritual self-liberation."<sup>2</sup> As the third chapter has demonstrated, however, no historical claim can be seen in that vision, and thus the first volume should by no means be read as an account of any historical development. Rather, for Cassirer, what matters is to exhibit the potential of the symbolic to make possible the "self-liberation" of the human being through its unfolding and to carry forward its insight into its own stake in symbolization. Cassirer thus does not, like Hegel, argue that the history of humanity leads towards "self-liberation"; rather, he demonstrates its factual possibility by working out the potential of the symbolic and ultimately by comprehending its unfolding as a normative *telos* for his philosophy of culture.

Such an emphasis on the "self-liberation" of the human being certainly matches neither the tone of philosophy in recent decades nor that of the cultural sciences, and it might provoke weighty systematic objections, hardly without justification. Nevertheless, on the view of the present study, it should still be recognized that the idealist point of Cassirer's philosophy of culture is anything but a speculation floating in the aether. In the first place, such a "self-liberation" does indeed aim at an emancipation from sensory immediacy, but it nevertheless makes use of sensory-material means, culminating in the "physical conditions" of language, and it must ultimately maintain its basis in the sensory character of the human being and in the mediality of the symbolic. Secondly, this emancipa-

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1 Sheet 1, p. 2.

2 Sheet 18, p. 7.

tion is indeed bound up with the insight into the peculiar activity of symbolization, but it is distinguished in principle from any symbolic constructivism. The reason is that symbolization constantly remains tied to the sensory givenness that it, in the final, albeit unattainable instance, seeks to assimilate into itself as its own construction. Thirdly, Cassirer does not merely postulate such a “self-liberation” or derive it immediately from one way of identifying the human being. Rather, he attempts, on the one hand, to defend its possibility in the critique of naturalistic reductionism, and, on the other hand, to exhibit it factually with the help of empirical and historical discoveries of the cultural sciences. Cassirer’s philosophy of the symbolic thus attempts to bring the human being to the peak of his possibilities, and, when viewed from a distance, it shares this goal with Heidegger’s identification of *Dasein* as “being-possible” [*Möglichsein*].<sup>3</sup> However, this “being-possible” takes a completely different form in Cassirer, because it is not reducible to *Dasein*’s own project, therefore running the risk of getting lost in the modern world. Rather, for Cassirer, all possibilities are granted by culture and its diversity. They necessarily pass through symbolization and are opened up not least by way of the differentiation that is peculiar to culture.

Even Cassirer’s idealism still appears bound to reality when it votes for the “self-liberation” of the human being. Cassirer does not involve himself with the empiricism of the cultural sciences merely in order to exhibit the possibility of freedom in the context of the facts. At the same time, he takes up the post-Hegelian challenge of philosophy and attains a considerable increase in complexity for his own philosophy from his reading of the cultural sciences. Finally, we should not forget what has not been dealt with in the present study: in all probability, the idealist thrust of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture also belongs to his specific cultural world, because he conceives of it in the summer of 1917, thus crafting an optimistic view of culture in the middle of the first world war. Cassirer is thus replying no less to a *zeitgeist* immersed in the critique of culture than to the possibility of a “self-liberation” that takes place by way of the unfolding and plurality of cultural forms. This stance may appear somewhat detached today – at the time, it was anything but. In this engaged position, Cassirer’s philosophy is more bound up with its world than a great deal of philosophy that makes the promise of turning towards the world without knowing itself as dwelling within the world.

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3 Cf. Heidegger (1996, pp. 143–145 and 248 f.).

# Appendix

## “‘Philosophy of the Symbolic’ (General Disposition)”<sup>1</sup>

Cassirer’s outline for a “‘Philosophy of the Symbolic (General Disposition)” has hitherto been unknown in the research and will be made accessible for the first time in the following pages. On the first page, it bears the date “13.VI.17” in Cassirer’s own handwriting, and it is part of a bundle of papers located among the Ernst Cassirer Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 98, Box 24, Folder 440, which consists of two sheets,<sup>2</sup> 33 x 21 cm. in size, that have been folded into one another. The eight pages are 16.5 x 21 cm. in size, and following the first page, which is dated, they bear page numbers ranging from 2 to 8. They are machine folded edgewise at a distance of 4–5 centimeters, and the resulting margin has been partially filled with writing. The paper is slightly brownish or yellowish in color, partially worn, and does not bear a watermark. The text is written in black ink, while individual underscores and annotations, as well as the pagination, were added with a blue or red pencil.

Additional bundles are connected, both formally and in terms of content, to this one, which is already described in the title (in black ink, underlined in red) as “Sheet I” (on this point, cf. the section “The Discovery” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 29–40 above): “General Disposition Sheet IIa)” (in the title, underlined in red, Box 24, Folder 441, 1 folded sheet, 4 pages, without pagination), “General Disposition Sheet IIb)” (in the margin, highlighted in blue, Box 24, Folder 441, following “Sheet IIa),” 1 folded sheet, 4 pages, without pagination), “General Disposition Sheet IIc)” (in the margin, highlighted in blue, Box 24, Folder 441, following “General Disposition Sheet IIb),” 1 folded sheet, 4 pages,

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1 “‘*Philosophie des Symbolischen*’ (*allg[emeine] Disposition*).” The version of this text transcribed in the German edition of this book preserves Cassirer’s ubiquitous shorthand, as well as other stylistic characteristics from the original, including line breaks. These characteristics have largely been omitted for the English translation in the interests of increasing the intelligibility and readability of the English text. -Trans.

2 *Bögen*. The material from Cassirer’s literary estate consists of a number of pages and sheets of varying sizes, which may cause some confusion. For the sake of simplicity, the English translation will employ the following conventions: Both the larger, folded sheets of the sort discussed here (German: *Bögen*) and the smaller, consecutively numbered sheets (*Blätter*) that they often contain will be referred to as “sheets,” although I will make use of clarifying details where helpful (e.g., translating *Bogen* as “large sheet” or “folded sheet” depending on context). The individual written pages (*Seiten*) on each side or section of a sheet will be referred to as “pages.” -Trans.

without pagination), “General Disposition Sheet IId)” (in the margin, highlighted in blue, with the heading: “VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic,” Box 24, Folder 440, 1 folded sheet, 4 pages, without pagination) and “General Disposition Sheet IIf” (in the margin, highlighted in blue, Box 24, Folder 440, following “General Disposition Sheet IIE,” 1 folded sheet, 4 pages, without pagination). The paper and inks used in the bundles cannot be distinguished from those that were already described in the context of “Sheet I.” Additional scraps of paper have been inserted into some of the bundles, but these by and large cannot be connected unambiguously with the “General Disposition,” and they have therefore not been included.

The bundles that have just been described make up the *Disposition* for the “Philosophy of the Symbolic,” which is structured according to a consistent plan: “I) The Psychology of the Symbolic,” “II) The Logic of the Symbolic,” “III) The Number Function (N),” “IV) General Doctrine of Knowledge,” “V) The Fundamental Problems of Aesthetics,” and “VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic.” They represent a coherent text of 32 pages, which the present study takes as its point of departure and which will therefore be documented over the course of the following pages. At the same time, this book will thereby make available to the research a text corroborating the beginning of Cassirer’s work on a project of a philosophy of the symbolic in June 1917, a project which ultimately led to the publication of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* beginning in 1923.

The following documentation of Cassirer’s *Disposition* does not pursue the goals of a critical edition, but is intended to make the text accessible to scholarly research. Moreover, in light of the detailed discussions contained in the present study, it dispenses with any commentary. The 32 pages of Cassirer’s *Disposition* are printed page-by-page in English translation.<sup>3</sup> The graphic structure of the pages has been reproduced roughly and schematically. The text makes use of the following conventions:

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**3** The original German version is accessible in the German version of the present study or as a scan of Cassirer’s *manuscript* that is freely available from the Beinecke Digital Collections. Direct access is possible via the following links:

<http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3542106>

<http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4099163>

<http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4099162>

Text – Underlining

~~Text~~ – Deletion

Te\x/t – Insertion between the lines

*Text* – Uncertainty concerning the original text

At the bottom of each page, a page number in square brackets is given, which corresponds to Cassirer’s pagination on the first eight pages and is then continued on the following pages. These page numbers correspond to those given in references of the text in the present study.





“Philosophy of the Symbolic” (General Disposition) Gen. 13.VI.17  
 Sheet I

verte!

I) The Psychology of the Symbolic

A) In general –

The problem of “expression” – the “inner” and the “outer” – The false dualism between inside and outside: the function of expression as a necessary function; as constitutive for the “existence” of the mental itself.

In the following, discussion and critique of psycho-physical “parallelism”

An incorrect question in this “parallelism”; suggests the view that there is first an inner, which subsequently and accidentally externalizes itself, comes to the surface –

Justification for the opposing view:

The inner and the outer not merely additive; complementary – but rather correlative.

(In the words of Goethe:

Nothing is inside, nothing is outside...

and of Hegel in the Logic)

Therefore, the body in relation to the mind is no

mere ἄλλο – (nor certainly the radical “other,”

the heterogeneous, as assumed by the entirety of dualistic metaphysics)

The deeper flaw in this view lies in the mere fact that one element is initially posited as existent, which then “expresses itself” or “discharges” in a process  
 In truth, the relationship is just the reverse: the only thing that is given in mental life is the process as a whole complex – the “state” does not exist for itself, but rather is merely an abstraction – There is thus a false, static view of the mental in operation here – In truth, we must also begin here with the dynamic – and derive the static from it! (Leads back to Substance and Function

2) but rather both are necessarily related to one another.

Knowledge of this necessary relationship annuls all metaphysics of mere “occasionalism.” Every path leads to “occasionalism”: it is the necessary and absolutely logical consequence; whenever this essential correlational unity is misunderstood.

Already here, therefore, we have to take a step that will prove to be fundamental on all levels henceforth:

The relation between mind and lived body must be converted from an “allegorical” relationship into a “symbolic” relationship:

the connected “otherness” into a doubly relational unity



What this unity initially signifies when it is understood purely psychologically; on what it is grounded, on what its necessity is based.

Also considered physiologically, every excitation of a nerve should already be thought of as a movement –  
 It is never localized restrictively, but rather always already belongs to a whole system of diffuse movements –  
 the excitation (the affect) thus does not “express” itself (as it were, accidentally) in movement, but rather is already movement.  
 Again, an analogy from physics:  
 1) the (“dead”) matter acted on by forces  
 2) Dynamic “construction” of matter (Kant, Faraday)  
 “Atom” as an auxiliary term

I) "Representation" as a mentally  
constitutive basic element

3

a) Evidence of this link

1) in the character of the mental as such  
Everything physical \material/ simply is; as a state of  
being, which has only a simple existence [*Da=sein*]  
and signifies nothing other than itself  
Everything that is called "mental" is fundamentally  
characterized by the fact that it not only "is," but  
rather goes beyond itself as a mere state of being;  
it "signifies" and "means" something else (a second)  
and ultimately a whole series of others

[Theory of the intentional and intentional acts

Literature, see: Brentano, Psychology

Uphues,

Husserl, Logical Investigations

Scholastic theory of the intentional]

2) in the character of the basic element of  
representation [*Vorstellung*]  
Representational consciousness [*Vorstell. Bewusstsein*]  
only possible by means of this representative; better:  
originally presentative function  
(Kant's synthesis of reproduction and recognition)

- 4 Depiction of the not-now in the now  
 This the secret of representational consciousness  
 [*Vorstellungsbewusstsein*] as such, such that without  
 this putative representation there is simply no  
 presentation possible –

(Brief) Analysis of time-consciousness –  
 time conditioned by the constantly vanishing  
 and constantly self-preserving moment

This passing away and remaining conceived of as  
unified first constitutes the concept and the  
 phenomenon of time –

It is not that “the” time is the form of inner sense;  
 but this basic representative moment is  
 simultaneously the precondition of “the” time of  
 “consciousness as such”

If, in counting, I forget –...

[The persistent and lasting ego as “correlation  
 of apperception.”

(but “ego” here is still all-too-complex  
 a concept!)]

If we call this function, by means of which the  
 “element” represents the totality of the series, the  
 universal series-function R, then the R-function is the  
 condition

- 1) of time-consciousness
- 2) of consciousness as such, of “inner  
 experience”

because even if I consider a momentary cross section of consciousness, the series-function is operative in it:

5

Condition both of the consciousness of coexistence and of the consciousness of succession.



II) Inadequate “explanations” of this phenomenon (also considered purely psychologically)

The derivation of representation from “association.” It collapses immediately once we have recognized what is ostensibly representation instead as “presentation”: because only the “present” can be associated, and so the apparent explanation here actually runs in a circle.

Return to the fundamental problem in Hume: Kant’s formulation: (problem of causation) How can I comprehend the fact that because of “something” there is a “something else?”

At best, association only means that a and b and c are there in consciousness; but the manner in which they are intertwined, related to one another, such that the one “represents” the other, is not explained thereby – not the ἔντι ψυχῆς, but rather merely ὡσπερ ἐν δουρείος ἵπποις

Here, put even more radically:

How can we comprehend the fact that, because a determinate mental state is “given” to me, there is also another [not immediately given] “existing” for us.

The mere “togetherness” and the mere sequence still says nothing at all concerning the ρ-function; the latter is not explained in so-called “association,” but is rather attained by fraud, implicitly conceived of as involved

This can obviously not be explained by “association”: because association itself contains precisely the same question.

[Final resolution: the question is flawed: because the totality, the R-function is what is genuinely “real” – the individual state merely an abstraction]

- 6 Even the problem of causation becomes unsolvable if we first consider the separate elements, then think about their relation –

It is solved by recognizing lawfulness as such (in causality) as a basic synthetic function. ]

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But this “representative” moment is not sufficient for the unity and for the phenomenon of consciousness as such, and so it is now faced with another. “Consciousness” does not only mean looking back, but also looking ahead; not only representation, but also anticipation. This comes particularly to the fore in will and impulse; but it is a fundamental character of “representation” [*Vorstellung*] as such. Representation [*Vorstellung*] does not only mean the image of something (= from something [*von etwas her*]), but rather a direction to something (= towards something [*auf etwas hin*]).

“Perceptio” is always simultaneously “*percepturatio*,” therefore tendency, striving!

Considered again in the context of time: in the present, not only the past, but also the future is re-presented [*vor-gestellt*] (= pre-formed in productive fantasy)

“No psychologist has yet thought that the imagination

is a necessary ingredient of perception itself” – but this applies first and foremost not only to the reproductive, but to the productive power of imagination, which relates and directs the present to the future, fabricating, as it were, by means of the future.

7

(This directional representation [*Richtungs-vorstellung*] ( $d\rho$ ,  $d\rho'$ ) will also prove to be a psychologically and logically basic characteristic of consciousness)

Psychologically, what must be added here first and foremost is an analysis of the representation of movement [*Bewegungsvorstellung*]: the latter, however, not conceived of as separate, but rather as an integral moment of movement itself. The “represented” [*vorgestellte*] movement is already a moment of the “executed” movement; both intelligible only in and alongside one another.

The “present” of consciousness, its existence thus consists in an intertwining of these relationships to the past and to the future : – of (theoretical) “perceptions” and (practical) tendencies towards movement.

But “theoretical” and “practical” can still not at all be separated here in this primordial form of consciousness!

(Therein lies the legitimate seed of “voluntarist” epistemology (e.g., Dilthey’s Origin of Our Belief in the Reality of the External World, q.v.!; but this moment is usually

[7]



8. quite overvalued, as if we were to “infer” an external world, a not-I, from the felt resistance.

This is not the case: no more do we “project” the “impression” into the “external world” by virtue of the *a priori* principle of causation.

---

Only after this can be discussed:  
 the symbolic function as a “transition” from “inner” to “outer”  
 (hitherto discussed purely in the context of the “inner”)  
 a “transition,” however, that is by no means a μεταβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος, therefore not an “allegory.”

(see the implementation of this sheet, pp. 1 and 2.!)

To develop it more precisely – every function of expression is already something internal-external – does not merely “signify” one such

Likewise via the function of expression (of the “imitation” of the expression), there initially exists for *itself* an animated “thou,” another subject (cf. implementation in Wundt’s *Ethnic Psychology*)

General Disposition      Sheet II a)

I) The Psychology of the Symbolic

See Sheet I

II) The Logic of the Symbolic

a) First, we must emphasize what we are not dealing with here \initially/

We are by no means \primarily/ dealing with the role of a so-called “symbolic logic” –

Of course, this problem in particular can just as easily be discussed later: see II b!

This is a very mediated and complex problem – and basically not a philosophical problem, but rather a technical one – a question of the practical “notation” of certain items of knowledge and thereby, of course, also the *attainment or rediscovery* of specific connections.

(In this context, symbolic logic, no matter how highly it is valued, can at best be compared with analytic geometry or the algorithm of differential calculus)

Even Leibniz’ outline of the universal characteristic or Lambert’s semiotics do not seem to go beyond this point.

Both are outlines for a sign language, once the concepts are already given, are known by other means: here, however, the point is for us to recognize

the “symbolic” moment as a constituent of the logical itself, therefore as a moment of the concept-function itself \as such/!

(Precisely analogous to the case of the psychological earlier: not the role of the symbolic in mental life, but rather as a condition of the “mental,” as a defining moment thereof – likewise not the symbolic, its use and its fruitfulness in logic, but rather as fundamental for the problem and task of logic itself)

a) The Problem of the Concept

1) Correct and incorrect theory of the concept –  
The phenomenon of “representation” (Berkeley!) Berkeley, in his otherwise correct critique of the “abstract” concept, only overlooks the fact that “representation” [not: association! cf. above, under Psychology!] already – is a concept.

“Power” of the individual to “represent” a totality  
Second question: what is “represented?”

Not the individual representations [*Vorstellungen*] and their sum (e.g., the totality of “the” triangles), but rather the constitutive series-function, the epitome of the relationship between member and member (“the” triangle)

General Theory of the Concept (cf. Substance and Function!)

## 2) Historical Connection

Conflict between “nominalism” and “realism” of the concept.

Relatively correct basic ideas for the solution were contained in “conceptualism” [*Terminismus*] –

but the “concept” [*Terminus*] may not be understood here as – “only a sign,” and thus as an expression of subjective arbitry [*Willkür*], but instead the objectifying function and significance of the ‘sign’ must be recognized!

Of course, this is only possible when the epistemology of the sign-function is understood; when it \is/ recognized that it is already indispensable in the structure of the objective reality of phenomena! – a notion that goes completely beyond the middle ages!

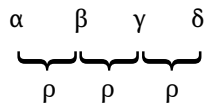
The sign ceases to be merely “nominal” - when

it is understood as a constituent of experiential reality as well (namely of its “relational” nexus). This, however, leads to problems that can only be dealt with in a later context!

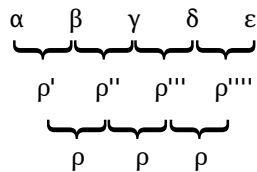
#### b) The Logic of Subsumption

[The “extent” of concepts and its expression in spatial symbolics.]

The derivation of the concept revealed the fact that the “series-principle” on which the concept is based can, in and for itself, be of a variety of types. Every fundamental relation that creates a form for the “attribution” [*Zuordnung*] of contents



or in more complex cases



gives rise to a particular mode of concept-formation. The concepts thus arising, however, exist,

as it were, on a variety of levels, depending on the productive point of view that is decisive here  
– Thus, e.g., thing-concepts and act-concepts  
object-concepts and number-concepts.

Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II b)

According to the mode of its emergence and validity, the concept of ,tree' cannot be compared with the concept of "5"; the concept of carbohydrates cannot be compared immediately with the concept of  $\pi$  or  $\sqrt{-1}$ , since the producing "categories" are different.

In the first case, the substance-category:

A thing "has" "property"  $\alpha$ ,  
does not have property  $\beta$

In the second, a pure category of ordering  
one element "follows" in series after another –

In general, all concepts that imply directions  
as spatial directions: above, below, right, left  
negative number

(It is often said here that this should be grasped only  
"intuitively," but that is a preconception; there are in  
any case pure directional concepts)

The groups of concepts arising in this way are thus  
initially disparate, "heterogeneous."

But because we are constantly dealing with their reciprocal  
relationship (because, e.g., "things" – are "counted,"  
thus thing-concepts and number-concepts are related  
to one another synthetically), there thus arises

the requirement for logic to overcome this heterogeneity by being related to an originary homogeneity.

The intuition of space presents itself as such a homogeneity – the former conceived of not as a qualitatively differentiated “psychological” space, in which merely qualitative differences play a role, above and below, right and left are not interchangeable – but rather as metric space, in which there are only differences of pure quantity, of size.

This explains the fact that, of the concepts – setting aside all the diversity of their “origin,” their “significance” and their productive point of view (producing category) – only their extent (thus, their pure size ratio) is retained

(This “external” relation is possible for all concepts; they all “have” an extent, though this of course says nothing about their otherwise totally diverse constitution, about their specific law of construction. How even the most heterogeneous things can be “counted”).

E.G., triangle, circle

– a series of formations  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$

If I abandon the form of the specific law of attribution (which is expressed in the “definition” of the triangle or circle), then the only thing that remains for me is the fact that, generally speaking, what is many is fused into one, there are many “instances” of a “concept,” a manifold therefore stands under a “genus.”

So-called “formal” logic comes to a halt at this mere moment of abstraction: its “form” consists simply in the fact that it abstracts from the specific form of concepts (just as number does not take charge of what is “numbered”)

Logic thus achieves the “homogeneity” of concepts by means of a symbolic representation of all conceptual relations in pure spatial relations Relations of extent, of the “greater” and “lesser”; of being-contained-in-one-another and being-contained-outside-one-another.

[On the other hand, however, only this general relation of homogeneity is retained from “metric” space, the greater and lesser, being-inside- and being-outside-one-another as such, not the how-many-times-as-large – thus, the basic provisions of the metric



as such come into question, but not their particularizations, which already arise in the application of the number-concept

Therefore  
here also  
 $a + a = a!!$

$a \leq b$  but not:  $n a = b$   
 $n b = a$

[Borderline cases in the “disjunctive” judgment]

---

In light of all this, the traditional way of dealing with “formal logic” can be explained

(Literature: Fr. Alb. Lange, Logical Studies  
Levons, Principles of Logic  
Implementation! Couturat, Algebra of Logic  
Schröder, Algebra of Logic

The spatial picture is the completely sufficient symbol for all relations under consideration here, but it is of course a mere-symbol!

And also, not only all differences of direction, but also of form [*Gestalt*] (indeed even of number; see above!) are annulled in it, only circles [remain]; only the general notion of the fundamental relationship of part and whole viewed in the form of space remains!

The whole of symbolic logic must be derivable from this – sub- and superordination of concepts, of judgments, and of conclusions (Implementation: The developed form of Aristotelian logic is this symbolic logic!)

Thereby, of course, we are now, in the context of the logical, already faced with a particular application of the symbolic (which comes about via the relationship of the “conceptual form” to the “spatial form,” thus at by means of one specific attribution). What forces itself upon us here is the general observation that the symbolic function can confront us in a wide variety of phases (and, so to speak, at various “altitudes”).

Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II c)

Not only “formal,” but also “objective” [*gegenständliche*] logic is “symbolic” for us; but both are so in different senses.

The symbolic of the logical function as such [the function  $\rho$  of the concept] is the fundamental; the function  $\sigma_{\mu}$  of the logic of extension, in contrast, a particular technical instrument for reproducing very specific relationships and abstractions. –

If this fact is realized, then the struggle against “formal logic” or “syllogistics” essentially comes to a halt

To be sure, this logic cannot “invent” anything (speaking in terms of content), but this is also not its essential aim; it belongs to a completely different sphere [“stratum”] of consideration.

Even the “knowledge of objects” indeed remains – symbolic, given that it does not give the “thing in itself” – but, in contrast to the mere logic of extension, it is of course a considerably expanded framework (as in the case of the Copernican vs. the Ptolemaic!)

Therefore the magic of number  
 a higher level (of organization) of  
 ++ mythical thought! perhaps  
 here as well already beginning  
 from the perception of the regularity  
 of the simplest cosmic relations  
 The number seven as the quartering  
 of the lunar orbit etc. see III, 471ff  
 Pythagoreans!!  
 cf. Schema!

Precursor: Significance of  
 number in mythical thought  
 Magic of numbers ++

For us, the development of the logical function  
 as ἀπόδειξις is followed by

III)

The Number-Function (N)

from which, in turn, emerges the whole system  
of exact sciences, namely

a) Concept of mathesis universalis as a  
 science of order and measure

a) Arithmetic

fundamental function of ordering ( $\omega$ ) grasped in a symbolic  
 expression of the first level ( $\sigma$ ) or  $\frac{\omega}{\sigma}$  as “numeral” and  
 “operational sign” (= counting sign!)

b) Algebra

fundamental function of ordering grasped in a symbolic expression  
 of the second level  $\frac{\omega}{\sigma^2}$   
 the number as a particular number, “represented” by the general  
 number (a, b, c...) [species in Vieta]  
general operational signs  $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$  etc.  
 where a and b [are] arbitrary numbers

α) Gen. Theory of Functions

probably more correct as superordinate  
The "function of series-ordering," namely  
a) as a function of simple  
series-ordering ("number")  
b) as series-attribution  
(theory of manifolds)  
c) as an ordering of juxtaposition  
"space"

see on this point explanation  
on the special sheet!  
(Exact Science)

This pointing back to the spatial function, which stands as something  
independent alongside the number-function

Geometry of Measure

Pure (Projective) Geometry  
as a "spatial theory of ordering"

General Theory of Manifolds

"Mapping" ["Abbildung"] of series onto one another  
Problem of cardinal numbers etc.  
Alternate "attribution" not of unities within a  
series, but of whole series

c) Analysis

The number-concept supplemented by  
the series-concept and function-concept  
"Variable" number –

Alternate attribution of series

β) Applied to continuous series  
infinitesimal analysis

γ) Applied to the relation between space and number  
(analytic geometry!)

To be dealt with following logic and exact science:

IV) General Doctrine of Knowledge

The “epistemology of the symbolic”

cf. Substance and Function    a) The universal and the particular.  
The particular as “representation” of the general case.  
The problem of induction and the structure of empirical science.  
What is the universal...

b) The problem of “empirical reality.”  
Symbol and object. Object-category and “representation.” (The “house” as a succession of perspectival images)  
The function  $\rho$  and the object-concept.

(Still to be elaborated...)

IVa) The problem of empirical science

IVb) The problem of the science of history – The methodology of history  
(Solution basically already expressed by Steinthal (Intro. 215) – history does not address the “universal”; but it does address the whole; it seeks to understand the individual by beginning with this comprehensive whole (particular spiritual categories for “classifying” the individual as part of the whole, contra Troeltsch!)

V) The Fundamental Problems of Aesthetics

Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II(d)

Once again, what should initially be put into question is not the role of the symbolic in aesthetics (the question is almost exclusively posed in this manner!), but rather the constitutive role of the “symbolic” in delineating the aesthetic “point of view,” the aesthetic “region!”

Thus, it is precisely analogous to the above case of the logical!

[cf. Gen. Disposition, Sheet IIa!]

1) The Primordial Aesthetic Function

the specific “point of view” –

It is mostly determined only negatively, as differentiated from the world of empirical reality, such as from the logical-scientific world [the world of “causality”]

According to this negative characterization, the aesthetic is the world of play, of semblance, of – illusion.

But this “illusion” is always a merely relative one.

Conscious self-deception – but we can only talk of deception if another standard of absolute reality is already presupposed!

This is precisely what we may not do in our general

methodology of the symbolic as such.

Some remarks on this in  
Münsterberg, Philosophy  
of Values?

We do not posit one level as “the” absolutely real one – rather, we ask: which positive, qualitatively determined form [*Gestaltungsform*] corresponds to the aesthetic “view”

Schiller’s theory of semblance and play, therefore, should rather be recast into the positive “image theory” of aesthetics as one specific mode of formation.  
(Therefore the definition: Beauty is a “living form” already comes closer to the mark

The fundamental difficulty of aesthetic theory lies in the fact that, here too, the positive symbolic has not been recognized, but was rather replaced by the concept of “imitation” – a development that finds its complete counter-image and correlate in the history of meta-physics (q.v.)

All forms of traditional aesthetic theories suffer from that difficulty

- a) Empirical theories of imitation from Aristotle to Batteux
- b) As well as idealist-speculative theories

Because here we are also always dealing with an archetype [*Urbild*] of the beautiful, which is somehow supposed to appear = shine through in the reflection [*Abbild*].

The aesthetic form as a reproduction of the metaphysical form

(Historical examples: Plotinus, Winckelmann, Shaftesbury!)

Allegory and symbol:  
the role of allegory  
in Winckelmann!

c) Even in all the modern psychological forms, in which the aesthetic

- 1) was interpreted as illusion, as "conscious self-deception"
- 2) or else empathy (the allegorical= metaphorical!) was regarded as the ground of aesthetics.

This form of  
aesthetics is quite  
clear in Schopen-  
hauer, World as Will,  
3rd book!

Biese, Philosophy of  
the Metaphorical?

The positive meaning of the aesthetic function as such; the core of the symbolic peculiar to it is once again thoroughly obscured by the concept of "imitation" and something that is to be imitated

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Particular significance of the symbol-concept within the aesthetic.

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Literature: Vischer, Aesthetics

The Symbol

Volkelt, System of Aesthetics;

Aesthetics of the Tragic

Biese, Philosophy of the Metaphorical

On “Empathy”: Lipps’ Spatial Aesthetics

---

$$\frac{\alpha\epsilon\sigma\tau\eta}{\sigma} = \frac{\quad}{\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \sigma_3}$$

The problem arises to the level of keen awareness in and in reaction to Lessing’s Laocoön: and indeed characteristically as a differentiation, an intensification of the earlier indeterminate concept of imitation:

ὕλη καὶ τρόπῳ τῆς μιμήσεως διαφέρουσιν. – The “arts” are characterized according to their specific “signs.” This deepening into “signs” leads to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic form of expression (as positively specific, as viewed in its own terms, not from the perspective of the object) as such. The specific aesthetic “regions” under aesthetics as an overarching region.

Particular implementation of the basic aesthetic forms

Cornelius, Elementary Laws    Hildebrand’s problem of the form in fine

of Fine Art    Sculpture: Writings by Konrad Fiedler    art

Worringer    Cf. dissertation by Konnerth?

Literature: We are singling out here poetic

Wittkop    symbolism!

R. M. Werner, Poetry

and Poet

Görland, Folk Songs

Analysis of Goethe’s lyrical “form,” cf. Freedom and Form.

VI) The Metaphysics of the Symbolic

Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II e.

We begin with the fundamental problem of metaphysics – with the relationship between truth and reality –

First standpoint: that of identity

either a naïve identity, as with the Ionians, in which case the problem as such cannot yet emerge at all – or a conscious identity – posited as with the Eleatics

ταυτόν γάρ ἐστὶν νοεῖν τε καὶ εἶναι

Or still in Descartes in modern philosophy:

“La vérité étant une même chose avec l’être”

But we cannot remain with this pure identity – which is already demonstrated by these examples.

For Parmenides, in spite of all the identity between “thinking” and “being” [αὐτο γὰρ ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκεν ἔστι νόημα.]

there is a second path – which is not that of “truth” – ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῆσδε ὁδοῦ διζήσεως εἶργε νόημα, a path which he is obliged to travel in order to get to a physics, a theory of (empirical) reality –

For Descartes, “thinking” and “extension” (being) are two substances, for which a connection and

a mediation is sought in God. –  
All of this points to a fundamental dualism.

First Attempt at a Solution to this Dualism:

Representation Theory [Abbildtheorie]<sup>4</sup>

[The “agreement” between “representation”  
[*Vorstellung*] and “object”  
The “similarity” between representation [*Vorstellung*]  
and object]

General Development of Representation Theory

1) The sensualist \empiricist/ form of representation theory – the “notion” as an effect is somehow similar to the “cause,” to the object

Main forms    α) Idol Theory

(Democritus, Epicurus, Gassendi.

β) The theory of “form” in Aristotle

γ) The species theory of the medieval period

δ) The overcoming of the medieval species theory

The mechanical representation theory

Movement as a fundamental concept – inner movement

as a “reaction” to outer movement [Schema: actio=

reactio]            Hobbes τὸ φαίνεσθαι as

“reaction”!

[26]

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of clarity, the term *Abbildtheorie* will be translated as “representation theory” throughout this *Disposition*, although the term in German has a much stronger meaning. As will become clear, Cassirer uses it in a quite broad and far-reaching manner. -Trans.

ε) Sensualist representation theory

The “simple” impression – ideas as copies of impressions (Hume and John St. Mill)

2) The idealist form of representation theory

The Platonic form of the theory: the Ideas as “archetypes,” appearances as “reflections” [“*Abbilder*”]. The positively fruitful \universal/ moment of the “Idea” as ἕτερον τι (cf. Plato-Collegium!!) is thus *narrowed* to the notion of “imitation of the Idea by the appearance” – the (symbolic) παρουσία and κοινωνία [empirical judgment points towards pure judgment – as a limit concept! e.g., the pure straight line, pure equality] is *narrowed* to the notion of μίμησις

The peculiarity of the purely logical function is also obscured by this notion of μίμησις; thinking becomes ἀνάμνησις, the recollection of something seen previously!

[Platonic form of representation theory – the allegory of the cave –

This allegory operates precisely at the border – it recognizes the knowledge of appearances as symbolic – but it requires turning from “creations” to the pure light –

therefore, the positive aspect of appearance – the necessity of the symbolic itself, its inability to be annulled [is] not comprehended (The “In the colorful reflection we have what is life”)

Underlying reason, because conceptual thinking is not envisioned here in the context of its own peculiar symbolics, but rather the concept (eidōs) is an αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό –

For this reason, it engulfs the appearance, annuls its validity, instead of allowing it to stand as a relative symbol!

Therefore, the significance of “experience” not secured despite every attempt in the second Platonic period – experience remains, although it [is] a παράδειγμα of the idea (παράδειγμασι ἄρα χρώμενοι *by the stars*) but always only “reflection” [*Abbild*]; retains a remnant of the Eleatic “semblance”)

Cf. on this point  
Lask, *The Logic of Being*,  
3) The overcoming of representation theory  
in the “Copernican Turn”

or  
Fichte’s idealism! What is essential lies in the transition to the positively

specific characteristic of the knowledge-  
function: this function does not reproduce  
the object, but rather it constitutes  
this object – indeed, it “is” the object itself.

Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II f

To this extent, the law of the logical the –  
“author of nature!”

Precisely the same  
development appeared  
earlier in aesthetics!

Now, therefore, the region of truth is able to be  
defined immanently, without any relation to  
correspondence with an external “original!”

(Positive meaning of the doctrine of the  
unintelligibility of the “thing in itself”: – it is not  
sought in “comparison” with the “absolute,” which  
is impossible, it is sought in pure categorial  
[specific] lawfulness itself!

Only thereby is the idea of imitation overcome:  
the allegory has transitioned into the positive  
“symbol”... .

— This too precisely as in  
the case of aesthetics  
see Gen. Dispos.  
Sheet II d

New relationship between truth and reality!

Positive implementation of this relationship

In Goethe's words: "We become aware of what is true in things as incomprehensible life"

We behold this life, which is for itself and freely "incomprehensible," within the various symbolic levels

Knowledge, Art, Philosophy, Religion

We do not differentiate among them, do not establish an absolute either-or of one or another phase: rather, the path through these symbolic levels is synonymous for us with the goal.

We do not know any other goal, a goal as an absolute endpoint, given that what matters for us is the process of self-renewing and increasing life itself.

The divine is not simply located outside of life as a "purpose," but rather it is this, its self-movement – Of course, in the face of the totality of this movement, the individual always remains

only a member, only a fragment

[Hegel: the moment to be sublated: The truth is the whole)

But genuine metaphysics is not intended, nor is it permitted, to conceive of this whole merely dialectically, as in Hegel –

because we would thereby already be faced once again with a merely abstract individual symbol –

but rather, in fullness and in context, in the particularity of specifically diverse symbolic expressions, lies for us the unity and the fullness of the world, of reality –

From the most primitive expression: from gesture through spoken language to the “concept,” to the aesthetic form, to the religious idea, to myth, there leads here One continuous path, One consistent “structure” –

in this path and on this path we have life – not simply as something otherworldly, to which this process only “points,” but rather as the concrete fullness of the diverse itself!

Language, Art, Concept, Myth

fused into one – each reciprocally lighting up – reflecting – this is the highest point to which even our “reflection” can advance.



But in a positive sense, behind this “reflection” is always standing the intuition of the true, of which we become aware as “incomprehensible life”

\*Jean Christophe!

So too in every genuine work of art,\* in every scientific work, this basic relation!

Just as in the “doctrine of knowledge” the object is not the “transcendent,” towards which we are merely pointed by our

experience; but rather, the totality, the overall content of experience itself; of course, however, as a

limit concept! Thus, the “in-itself” of this metaphysics remains even here a limit concept and not something otherworldly, but rather the idea “in relation to which all our knowledge undergoes a fusion into a systematic unity –

This “life” the best-known and the most underivable the mystery manifest!

The symbol in this sense – this unity, which always remains the same in the next case and the next, again and again – this is perhaps the final form of metaphysics that is possible for us!

Not the goal, but rather the series itself is what identifies this metaphysics; because the goal would be – death; only the series itself is life!

We know this “life” only in its “expressions”; but precisely this is the quintessence of our whole preceding observation that “expression” is nothing accidental, inessential, “external,” but rather that it is the necessary, the true, and the sole manifestation of the “inner” and of the essence itself. From \the/ simplest gesture, from spoken language up to the highest spiritual activities and to the purest “metaphysics,” this insight has proved itself to us.

Everything transient is only an allegory – but precisely as an allegory it ultimately attains pure eternal value!

## “Material and Preliminary Work on the ‘Philosophy of the Symbolic’”

### List of Sheets

In a large sheet, which is dated to 7/27/1918 and which bears the title “Material and Preliminary Work on the ‘Philosophy of the Symbolic,’” Cassirer wrapped a set of working notes that arose in connection with the Disposition for the project from 1917 (cf. this sheet in the Ernst Cassirer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT, USA, GEN MSS 98, Box 23, Folder 429, as well as, on the discovery from the archive and on the subject of dating, the section “The Discovery” in the first chapter of the present study, pp. 29–40 above). We can reconstruct a self-contained set of at least 241 consecutively numbered sheets, which for the most part arose between the summer of 1917 and the summer of 1918.

The following list indicates in three columns a) the numbering in Cassirer’s own notation, b) the location (Box and Folder according to the index of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library), as well as c) Cassirer’s heading. As such, the numberings in Cassirer’s own writing are cited inclusive of the description “Sheet” or “S.”;<sup>5</sup> the Roman or Arabic numerals are not standardized, unlike in the case of the supporting documents cited in the present study. This also holds true for Cassirer’s idiosyncrasy of numbering individual folded sheets in part by added numerals (“VI, 1” and “VI, 2”). Thus, these numerals do not agree with the page numbers that result from simply numbering the pages and which are given as a reference in the citations used in the present study. Finally, the titles are given without underscores. Titles, numerations, and headers in the margin that were added later, to the extent that they are unambiguously recognizable as such, have not been reproduced.

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5 In the original German, these numberings are listed as “Blatt” and “Bl.” -Trans.

Sheet Number	Location	Heading
Sheet 1	24, 441	On the progress from the “sensory symbolic” to the “conceptual symbolic”
Sheet II	29, 548	Language
Sheet III	50, 1010	Language
S. IV + IV, 2	24, 441	On the progress of the symbolic from the simplest “sensory” to the highest “spiritual” level
S. V, 1–2	23, 429	Language (separately on the structure of language, word forms, etc.)
S. VI, 1–6	24, 441	Symbolic Function (in General)
S. VII, 1–2	29, 548	In General on the “Problem of the Symbol”
S. VIII, 1–2	24, 441	The Sign and the Construction of “Subjective” Reality
VIII, 5	24, 441	The Construction of Objective Reality
On VIII	24, 441	Myth (Construction of Subjective Reality)
On VIII a	24, 441	Myth (Construction of the Subject)
VIII c)	24, 441	Myth (Discovery of the World of Objects)
VIIIh	24, 441	Myth, General (Material and Point of View)
VIIIi	24, 441	Myth, Peculiarity of the Greek Pantheon
S. IX	24, 441	On the ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ of the symbolic forms
S. X	24, 441	Symbolic Function (in General), On ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’
S. XI, 1–3	24, 440	Number, preliminary stage of the theme of number in language and in particular in mythical thought
S. XIII	29, 548	On the metaphysics of the symbolic
S. XIV	24, 441	Moments of the Symbolic Expression
S. XV	29, 548	In General on the Problem of the Symbol (cf. S. VII)
S. XVI, 1	24, 441	On the symbolic (in general), Psychology of the Representative Function
XVI, 2–3	24, 442	
S. XVII + XVII, 2	23, 431	P. 4/5 On the metaphysics of the symbolic function, in general on the symbolic function
S. XVIIa	23, 435	Language “Autonomy of Language”
S. XVIII, 1–2	24, 442	Moments of the Symbolic Expression

*Continued*

Sheet Number	Location	Heading
S. XX, 1–2	23, 435	Language, Onomatopoeia
XXI	26, 498	Language
XXII, 0–2 + XXII, 1 α	26, 494	Myth (provisionally on the general structure)
XXIII, 1–2	29, 548	In General on the Symbolic Function (position on subjectivity and objectivity)
XXIV, 1	23, 429	Language, General
XXIV, 2–4	28, 543	
Sheet α (on XXIV, 4)	28, 543	On the theory of concept-formation (in connection with language)
XXIV, 5	28, 543	On Noiré’s theory
S. XXV	24, 442	Metaphysics of the Sign
XXVIII	24, 442	Symbol (in General), Superposition of Symbol-Forms
XXIX	26, 494	Myth, Transition from Language to Myth
XXX, 1–5	24, 442	Signs (in General)
(a) (on XXX, 2) P. 3	24, 440	Deficiency in the Theory of Association
(b) (on XXX, 2, S. 2)	24, 442	
XXXI, 1	24, 440	Science
XXXII	24, 442	Concept of the Symbol (in General), On the dialectic of the concept of the symbol
33, 1–3	28, 543	Language
34	24, 442	Symbolics (in General)
35	23, 429	Language, Verbal Roots and Pronominal Roots
36, 1–2	23, 429	Language, General Structure
a [on 36, 1]	23, 429	Language
37	23, 429	Language, Judgment, Proposition (cf. extraction, Sheet...)
38	24, 442	Concept of the Symbol (in General)
38, 2	24, 442	
39	29, 548	Symbol-Forms (in General)
41	26, 494	Myth, (New Disposition), Transition from Language
42	24, 440	Science (General Structure)

*Continued*

<b>Sheet Number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Heading</b>
a, on 42, I, P. 2	24, 440	
43	29, 548	Symbolics (In General – Metaphysics), On the idealism of the symbolic function
44	23, 429	Language, Sütterlin, The Essence of Linguistic Structure [...]
45	23, 429	Language, On the primacy of verbal concepts over object-concepts
46, 1–2	23, 429	Language, On the question of roots
47	23, 435	Language, Sound Imitation, Onomatopoeia
48	23, 435	Language, Onomatopoeia
49	23, 434	Language, Case Forms – Inflection
50	23, 436	Language, Proposition –
51	23, 429	Language, Root, Root Theory
52	23, 429	Language, On the General Disposition
53	23, 434	Language, Determination – Series-Formation
54	23, 429	Language
55	23, 437	Language, Verb
56	23, 429	Language
57	23, 434	Language, Genus, Grammatical Gender
58	23, 429	Language
59	23, 429	Language
60	23, 429	Roots
61	23, 430	Language, Inner Form of Language
62	24, 442	Signs, Idealism of the Sign
63	23, 429	Signs (Myth)
64	23, 429	Language, (Agglutination, Inflection)
65	23, 435	Language
66	23, 437	Language (Suffixes)
67 + 67, 2	24, 442	General, Introduction: Allegory – Symbol – Metaphor
68, 1–2 + 68, 1 (b)	26, 494	(Religion), Buddhism

*Continued*

Sheet Number	Location	Heading
69	23, 429	Root
70	23, 429	Language, Inflection
71	23, 429	Language
72	26, 494	Myth in General, Relation to Language
73	26, 494	(Religion), the Vedas – Philosophy of the Vedas
74	26, 494	Religion, Indian Religion
75	26, 494	Religion (Image)
76	26, 494	Religion
77	26, 494	Myth – Religion (Transition to Science)
78	26, 498	Language
79	23, 429	Language
82	24, 442	In General on the Problem of the Symbol
83, 1–3	24, 442	The Problem of the Symbol in General, On the disposition of the introductory chapter
84	24, 440	Knowledge, Knowledge and Myth
85	26, 494	Myth
87	29, 548	Language
88, 1	24, 447	In General (on the Metaphysics of the Symbol-Forms)
88, 2	29, 548	
89, 1–5	24, 442	Concept of the Symbol (in General), Transcendental Psychology
90	24, 442	Concept of the Symbol (in General), – Transcendental Psychology
91	29, 548	Concept of the Symbol (in General), Philosophy (Metaphysics) of the Symbolic
94, 1–2	24, 400	Knowledge, Science, In General on “Modality”
96	23, 429	Language, On the “Dichotomy” of the Linguistic
100	24, 442	Transcendental Psychology
101	24, 440	Knowledge (Logic)
102, 1a-1b	23, 431	Language

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Sheet Number	Location	Heading
103, 1a-1b + 103, 2	26, 494	Myth
105	26, 494	Myth
106	23, 430	Language
108	23, 429	Language, Vossler, Positivism and Idealism in Linguistic Science [...]
109	23, 429	Language (Series-Formation – Determination)
112, 1–2	23, 429	Language
113, 1–2	26, 494	Myth, Development of the Concept of Soul
115	24, 442	Concept of the Symbol (in General), perhaps: Metaphysics of the Symbolic
116	26, 494	Myth
117	23, 429	Language, Jespersen, Otto: Progress in Language [...]
118	23, 429	Language, (Inflection)
119	23, 429	Language (Gender)
120	23, 429	Language, Theory of Agglutination
121	23, 429	Language, Grammatical Gender
122	23, 429	Language
123	26, 494	Myth
124	26, 494	Myth
125	23, 429	Language, (Origin of Language)
126	26, 494	Myth, Wilhelm Mannhardt, Cults of Forest and Field
128	29, 548	Concept of the Symbol (in General)
129	26, 494	Myth (Religion)
130	26, 494	Myth, Order, Rita
131	26, 494	Religion
132	26, 494	Religion, Myth
133	26, 494	Religion (Myth), Buddhism
134, 1–2	26, 494	Religion, Myth
135	23, 437	Language Activity

*Continued*

Sheet Number	Location	Heading
136	23, 429	Language, Origin of Language
137	23, 429	Language, Max Müller, Science of Thought [...]
138	23, 429	Language
139	23, 434	Language, Theory of Case
140	23, 429	Language
141	23, 430	Language
142	26, 498	Language
145, 1–2	28, 546	Concept of the Symbol (in General), Natorp, General Psychology
147	23, 437	Language
148	23, 437	Language, Pronouns
149	23, 429	Language, Theory of Case
150	23, 429	Language
151	23, 429	Language
152	23, 429	Language, Structure of Semitic Languages
153, 1–2	26, 500	Myth, Babylon, see Jensen, Cosmology of the Babylonians
154	26, 500	Myth, Order – Rita –
156, 1–4	23, 429	Language, Also on the Concept of the Symbol (in General)
157	26, 500	Myth, In General on Modality
158	26, 500	Myth, Frobenius, The Worldview of the Primitives [...]
159	23, 433	Language, Sign Language
160	23, 438	Language, Expression of Temporal Relations
161	23, 433	Language, (Pronouns)
162	26, 495	Language
163	23, 429	Language
164	23, 435	Language
165	23, 439	Language, Counting, Designation of Numerals
166	23, 436	Language
167	23, 429	Language



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Sheet Number	Location	Heading
168	23, 434	Language (Suffixes)
169	50, 1010	Language, Child Language: Clara and William Stern, Child Language [...]
170	23, 429	Language, (Proposition)
171	24, 447	Concept of the Symbol (in General)
172	23, 439	Language, (Concept-Formation)
173	23, 437	Language, Child Language (in General)
174	23, 437	Language, "Origin of Language"
175	23, 433	Language, Numerals
176	23, 437	Language, Teleological Meaning; Active Meaning
177	23, 435	Language, Onomatopoeia [...]
178	23, 436	Language, Pronouns
179	29, 548	Concept of the Symbol (in General)
180	26, 500	Religion, Prophecy
181	26, 500	Religion, Concept of God
182	23, 429	Language, Origin of Language
183	23, 429	Language, Articulation – Significance of Articulation
184	26, 500	Myth
185, 1a–1b	26, 500	Myth, Karl Beth, Religion and Magic [...]
186, 1–4	26, 500	Magic
188	26, 500	Religion
189	26, 500	Myth, Albrecht Dieterich, A Mithras Liturgy [...]
190	24, 443	Concept of the Symbol, In General
190	26, 495	Myth, [Sign, Word, Name] <sup>6</sup>
191	26, 501	Myth, Religion
191, 1–5	26, 500	Myth – Magic, Form of Mythical "Causality"

<sup>6</sup> There are two sheets with number 190, with both numbers apparently having been amended. The same holds true for number 191.

*Continued*

<b>Sheet Number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Heading</b>
192, 1–2	26, 501	Magic
193	26, 501	Myth – Magic
194	26, 501	Magic
195	26, 501	Myth, Magic
196	26, 501	Myth, Magic
197	26, 501	Art, Art and Myth –
198	26, 501	Myth
199, 1–2	26, 501	Magic, Animism, Development of the Concept of Personhood
200	26, 501	Religion, Myth
201, 1–2	26, 501	Religion, Myth
202	26, 501	Religion, (Rîta – Order)
203	26, 501	Myth, (Activity, Moment of Activity etc.)
204	26, 494	Myth
205, 1–2	26, 501	Myth [Orderliness, Order, Rîta]
206	26, 501	Myth [Order, Orderliness, Rîta]
207	26, 501	Myth, In General on Methodology
208	26, 501	Myth, General Symbol-Form
209, 1a–1b	26, 501	Myth (In General)
210	26, 501	Myth, Andrew Lang, Myth, Ritual and Religion [...]
211	26, 501	Myth, Theriomorph Gods
212	26, 501	Myth – Religion, (Monotheism)
213	26, 501	Myth, Concept of Form in Egyptian Religion
214	26, 501	Myth (Image)
215	26, 501	Aesthetics, Transition: Art and Myth, Art and Magic
216	26, 501	Myth, On Totemism
217	26, 501	Myth, Taboo...
218, 1a–1b	26, 501	Myth, Religion, Totemism –
219, 1–2	26, 501	Myth, In General on the Symbol-Form –
220, 1a–1b	26, 501	Myth, In General on the Symbol-Form

*Continued*

<b>Sheet Number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Heading</b>
221, 1	26, 501	Myth, Rîta – [Babylonian Religion, Pan-Babylonianism]
221, 2	26, 494	
222	23, 436	Language
223	26, 495	Magic, Myth, On the “omnipotence of thoughts”
224	26, 498	Myth, Religion, On “Totemism”
225	26, 495	Magic, Spells, Sympathetic Magic
226	23, 433	Language, Counting, Calculation
227	26, 494	Myth, Religion, Courade
228	23, 429	Language (Name), Significance of the Name
229, 1–2	29, 548	Concept of the Symbol (in General), Metaphysics of the Symbolic
230	26, 500	[Magic; also pertaining to language], Magic of Names
231	26, 495	Myth, Soul –
232	26, 498	Myth, Significance for Reality –
233	26, 495	Myth..., Tabu
234	26, 495	Myth, Magic
235	26, 495	Myth
236	26, 495	Myth, Vegetation Demons –
237	26, 495	Myth
238	26, 495	Myth
239	26, 495	Myth, Vegetation Demons
240	26, 500	Myth, Totemism..., (Life-Context)
241	26, 500	Myth (Rîta)

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