

Tobias Endres, Pelegrinno Favizzi, Timo Klattenhoff (editors), *Philosophie der Kultur- und Wissensformen. Ernst Cassirer neu lesen* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Brussels, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Vienna: Peter Lang, 2016)

Reviewed by Ioan Alexandru Tofan

Revisiting a classic such as Ernst Cassirer is far from easy. Firstly, the most recent trends in philosophy indicate a propensity for deconstruction and experiment rather than re-reading traditional texts or restoring great authors of the past. Secondly, at a first glance, Cassirer himself seems to resist re-reading: his precise distinctions, the attention and rigour of this discourse, as well as the vast range of interests (his complete works, published by Meiner Verlag, stretch over 26 volumes, and his posthumous edition just 18 for the time being), sometimes daunts the reader who may hesitate upon testing his concepts by taking a fresh line of questioning away from the trodden path.

And yet, the book edited by Tobias Endres, Pelegrinno Favizzi and Timo Klattenhoff is a certain success. Its contributors are not “hurried” readers. As members or admirers of the *Cassirer-Arbeitsgruppe* (Technische Universität, Berlin) and doctoral students of Cassirer’s work, they start from the premise that, read carefully, the philosopher’s concepts are already open to perpetual reassessment, even a transdisciplinary reassessment that constantly pushes the pre-established borders between sciences or the boundaries of some phenomenological analysis: “So bewegt sich die Philosophie Cassirers programmatisch in einer Zwischensphäre, in einem infinitesimalen Raum zwischen den vielfältigen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des menschlichen Geistes: Sie zeichnet sich insofern durch einen ausgeprägt transdisziplinären Charakter aus, als dass sie die Wissensfelder nicht als vorgefertigte Gebiete annimmt, sondern sie integrativ anspricht, um Vernetzung und Interaktion zu fördern und dadurch die Schaffung neuer Erkenntnis zu ermöglichen“ (p. 13). The philosophy of symbolic forms is mainly a transcendental enterprise permanently open to re-evaluation, not a closed conceptual construct. Christian Möckel’s article (*Symbolische Formen als Wissensformen?*) highlights the plasticity of Cassirer’s philosophical terms and the great potential for assuming them in phenomenological and anthropological contexts. Equally interesting is the discussion about the way in which Cassirer re-interprets hallmarks of philosophical tradition (such as the Hegelian dialectics explored by Sevilay Karaduman), or the connections he makes with contemporary

issues of the action theory (via Joel-Philipp Krohn's discussion of American pragmatism). In other words, a renewed reading of the German philosopher's work defines a series of models in Cassirer's very *modus operandi* when he formulates his own thinking and way of looking at the world.

But a competent reading is not enough. The reader needs to take the appropriate perspective to Cassirer's concepts. A philosophy's topicality may be understood in different ways and, on many occasions, unabashed persistence may even end up twisting it in the wrong direction turning it into a token of academic performance in the field of humanities. But the authors point to an important aspect that saves them from idle sensationalism: that the *Cassirer-Reinassance* of the nineties is in fact an internationalization of his work (the editors talk about a globalized Cassirer). As the Contents page shows, basically the entire international academia has undertaken a "new" reading of the philosophy of symbolic forms. So, in this context, "new" means 'different' rather than 'recent,' marked by a multitude of social and cultural realities. How can a series of concepts derived from the essence of Western tradition be applied beyond the phenomenological field it is faced with? In what way can new worlds such as the Internet (as in Rafael Garcia's text) or contemporary cinematography (as in Peter Remmers' article) bear Cassirer's analysis of cultural forms? The views around classic instances of symbolic forms (such as painting in Yosuke Hamada's analysis of aesthetic intuition, or money in Timo Klattenhoff's parallel reading of Cassirer and Simmel) converge around a practically infinite universe of symbolic forms – forms of a surprising complexity and historical evolution. A second goal of reading, rooted in Cassirer's own interests but still open to unlimited reformulation, is of political nature in the wide sense of symbolic construct of human reality. In this context, Pellegrino Favuzzi explores the possibility to integrate reason and emotion in the definition of a "rational pathos" (*Vernunftpathos*) of *zoon politikón*, and Gisela Starke studies the mythological structure of National Socialism in order to decipher its totalitarian mechanisms. As to the reference to Cassirer, the novelty is a systematic appeal for plurality and tolerance via the critique of the redefined forms of culture and of its reception. As Servanne Jollivet places Cassirer's writings in the *Historismus-Debatte* context, she studies the relativism/dogmatism dualism that dominates the discussion of man's historical situation, and she develops the idea of a dynamic unity with immediate consequences in the way we perceive, and talk to, the *other*.

The issues regarding reassessing some basic principles of Cassirer's vision (such as the relationship between the philosophy of symbolic forms and an integrative theory of perception – in Tobias Endres' text; the question whether

philosophy itself can be seen as a symbolic form – with Claudio Bonaldi; or Felix Schwartz’s critical discussion on Cassirer’s anti-Naturalism) complete the series of the above-mentioned specific topics. Thus, the contemporary re-evaluation of Cassirer’s work is not restricted to highlighting the relevance of his concepts in various current theoretical disputes, but implies the effort of re-reading him in depth and dynamically understanding him in the fundamental premises of his discourse. It is an organic, integrative perspective on the method and perspective that Cassirer applies to culture, politics, or the stake and forms of knowledge, and it ensures consistency and coherence to any effort of re-reading and interpretation. “Ernst Cassirer neu lesen” becomes „Ernst Cassirer neu begegnen und zusprechen.”

The success of this book’s enterprise is also due to the fact that it is the result of a lively dialogue between the contributors. Dr. Martina Plümacher and Dr. Christian Möckel are founding members and catalysts of the Ernst Cassirer-Arbeitsgruppe as part of the *Innovationszentrum Wissensforschung der Technischen Universität* Berlin. The debates within this study group featured some converging topics coming from a variety of research areas. All of them meet around Cassirer’s figure seen in a fresh light by today’s readers.