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KARL BÜHLER'S AND ERNST CASSIRER'S SEMIOTIC CONCEPTIONS OF MAN

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite trois séries de problématiques : il résume d'abord les principales thèses de la démarche linguistique de Karl Bühler (1879-1963) et de la démarche philosophique de Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), dans leur fondement sémiotique ; ensuite, il démontre dans quelle mesure ces auteurs ont dégagé des conséquences d'ordre anthropologique à partir de leurs réflexions sémiotiques ; enfin, il met en évidence quelques unes des différences les plus importantes entre les conceptions sémiotiques et anthropologiques de Bühler et de Cassirer.

ABSTRACT

The present essay focuses on three aspects: firstly, it outlines the basic assumptions of Karl Bühler's (1879-1963) and Ernst Cassirer's (1874-1945) semiotically grounded linguistic or philosophical undertakings; secondly, it demonstrates the extent to which both scholars drew anthropological conclusions from their particular semiotic considerations; finally, it brings into view some of the most substantial differences between Bühler's and Cassirer's semiotic and anthropological conceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Karl Bühler (1879-1963) and Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) were among the most prominent intellectual figures of the 20th century. Bühler, who was an assistant to the experimental psychologist Oswald Külpe before he consecutively headed the Institutes of Psychology at the Universities of Dresden and Vienna (*cf*. C. Bühler, 1984, 25f.), first drew attention by

[1] All quotations which are based on the German original of Bühler's and Cassirer's publications have been translated into English by the author of the present essay.

critically examining Wilhelm Wundt's, at that time, widely established mechanistic conception of psychology (*cf.* Bühler, 1907, 1908a, 1908b). Subsequently, Bühler came to be one of Europe's most recognised scholars in the fields of cognitive and developmental psychology as well as psychology of language and theory of language. Even today, works like *Die geistige Entwicklung des Kindes* (1918) or *Sprachtheorie* (1934) can be regarded as classics in the histories of psychology and the theory of language.

Cassirer, on the other hand, gained considerable reputation for his critical appraisement and transformation of Kantianism. Especially his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929) ranks as one of the most ambitious and original philosophical enterprises of the preceding century. In effect, it is practically impossible to deal with epistemological, anthropological, cultural, or semiotic problems without coming across Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms.

Bühler and Cassirer, who were acquainted with each other and knew each other's works intimately, have several biographical similarities. Both had to give up their academic positions after the Nazis took control of Germany and Austria. While Cassirer had to escape from Hamburg – his place of residence since 1919 – only three months after Hitler seized power (*cf.* T. Cassirer, 2003, 194-210), Bühler was forced to leave Vienna shortly after the fascists marched into Austria in 1938 (*cf.* C. Bühler, 1984, 27). Different than Cassirer, who was born into a lettered and wealthy Jewish family, Bühler was even confined to prison temporarily because he was accused of promoting the Austro-Catholic movement and being "philo-semitic" (*cf. ibid.*).[2]

Fortunately, both scholars were able to immigrate to the USA after they sojourned in Great Britain, Sweden, or Norway. Bühler worked as a guest professor in Oslo for a short time before he moved overseas. After lecturing at two rather unknown Colleges in Minnesota (first at the Scholastic College in Duluth, then at the St. Thomas College in St. Paul), he went to Los Angeles where he ran a psychological private practice with his wife and worked as a psychological counsellor in a hospital (*cf.* C. Bühler, 1984, 27f.).

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[2] Many of Bühler's students and assistants – such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda, Karl R. Popper, or Rudolf Ekstein, to name but a few – were Jewish and/or supporters of the Austro-Marxist opposition. Moreover, Charlotte Bühler – Bühler's wife who was a renowned psychologist herself – was of Jewish ancestry and thus not tolerated by the National Socialists. For a detailed history of the Vienna Institute of Psychology, *cf.* Benetka, 1995.

Cassirer first found academic asylum at the Universities of Oxford and Gothenburg[3] from where he moved on to the Universities of Yale and Columbia. Unlike Bühler, he quickly managed to master the languages of his host countries well enough that he was ultimately able to write his last two major publications – *An Essay on Man* (1944) and *The Myth of the State* (1946) – in a tongue that was to be become the lingua franca of science and philosophy after the end of World War II. Although Bühler by no means abandoned his psychological, linguistic, and semiotic investigations in the aftermath of his forced immigration (*cf*. Eschbach, 1983), he would be unable to produce a newer publication that would receive as much response as his former releases. Whereas Cassirer, then, was not only able to maintain but also to better his philosophical standing in the course of his exile, Bühler increasingly faded from the spotlight. Albeit his *organon model of language* (*cf*. chapter 2 below) is probably still known to any student and scholar of linguistics, only few of Bühler's significant publications have been translated into English. In contrast, almost every major treatise of Cassirer is now available in English. As a consequence, the reception and study of Cassirer's philosophy is (albeit to a large extent not before the 1980s) progressively flourishing both in Europe and in the Anglophone countries,[4] whereas a large proportion of Bühler's main ideas are only being discussed in a relatively small circle of linguistic or semiotic adepts.

In addition to these predominantly tragic biographical commonalities and blows of fate, Bühler and Cassirer first and foremost shared numerous theoretical interests. One the one hand, both of them extensively explored the specificity and functionality of language. On the other hand, the two of them considered semiotics to be of vital importance for their respective linguistic and philosophical investigations. In fact, Bühler's and Cassirer's theories of signs can be rated as two of the most decisive contributions to the history of semiotics. In this context, they also brought forth several insights which are still of great anthropological value.

In the present essay, I shall primarily focus on three aspects: Firstly, I want to outline the basic assumptions of Bühler's and Cassirer's semiotically grounded linguistic or philosophical undertakings. Secondly, I intend to demonstrate the extent to which both scholars drew anthropological conclusions from their particular semiotic considerations. Finally, and despite the

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[3] In 1939, after living and working in Gothenburg for four years, Cassirer even obtained Swedish citizenship. As John Michael Krois suggests, « the most important years in Cassirer's life as a philosopher were neither those in Germany nor his final 4 years in America, but his 6 years in Gothenburg » (Krois, 2004, 20).

[4] Brigitte Schlieben-Lange accurately highlighted that the growing interest for Cassirer is mainly related to his philosophical writings whereas the impact of his Philosophy of Symbolic Forms for theory of language is generally suppressed (*cf*. Schlieben-Lange, 1997, 279).

numerous analogies which are going to be revealed by the following comparative inspection, my aim is to bring into view the most substantial differences between Bühler's and Cassirer's semiotic and anthropological conceptions.

In order to reconstruct Bühler's semiotically deduced notion of man, I shall first deal with the so-called organon model of language which represents one of the most crucial key concepts within his theory of language (chapter 2). Then, and with continuous reference to Bühler's semiotic notion of man, I will discuss the semiotic foundations of Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms and his idea of man as *animal symbolicum* (chapter 3).

2. BÜHLER AND THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOLICITY AS THE *DIFFERENTIA SPECIFICA* OF MAN

Bühler is most often associated with his magnum opus *Theory of Language*. This seminal treatise does not only summarise Bühler's most significant thoughts about the specific capacity of language, it also contains a multitude of ideas that are still of great value to the contemporary theory of language. However, and as Gerold Ungeheuer rightly suggested (*cf.* Ungeheuer, 1967, 41), the theoretical extent of Bühler's *Theory of Language* cannot be comprehended sufficiently unless another equally pivotal book – namely, *Die Krise der Psychologie* (*The Crisis of Psychology*), which was first published in 1927 – is taken into account of as well (*cf.* Bühler, 2000).[5]

Despite its seemingly non-linguistic title, Bühler's *Krise* does indeed mirror and anticipate numerous assumptions that can be found in a more elaborated form in the succeeding *Theory of Language*. These complementary references especially concern the famous *organon model of language*, which constitutes a substantial centrepiece of the *Theory of Language*. Yet, Bühler's *Krise* is by no means merely a preparatory work towards the *Theory of Language* but rather a fully autonomous study that discusses a great number of problems which are in fact primarily of psychological nature. At the same time, though, Bühler made unmistakably clear that he « did not move out to reform psychology but to find the axioms of the theory of language » (Bühler, 2000, 49). According to him, the quest for « the *axiomatics* and *methods* of psychology » (*ibid.*, 19) is inseparably interwoven with the quest for the axiomatics of language. Thus, he insisted that the study of psychology inevitably requires the study of language as well.

Since this symbiotic conjunction may appear odd and unconventional from a present-day perspective, I would like to review the basic intentions of

[5] Cassirer remarked that these two publications « belong together and explain each other » (Cassirer, 1996, 151), too.

Bühler's *Krise* first before taking a closer look at some of the most essential elements of his theory of language:

Bühler composed the *Krise* for the purpose of critically commenting on the theoretical and methodological condition of contemporary psychology. When he published his detailed review of the situation, academic psychology was still a relatively novel discipline. Therefore, psychology was still eagerly searching for its theoretical and methodological foundations. Like any science that deals with the functionality of the human mind and the outgrowths of human behaviour, early academic psychology could of course hark back to the works and thoughts of philosophers like David Hume, John Locke, or Immanuel Kant, who had all now and then touched upon questions that are of psychological interest. Nevertheless, most of Bühler's contemporaries were unable to agree on a particular theoretical or methodological framework that would serve as a generally accepted foundation of psychological research. As a result, this state of disagreement gave rise to the establishment of a plurality of theories and methods that postulated their own fundamental conjectures in an extremely dogmatic and mutually excluding manner.

Bühler deplored this kind of ignorance and academic isolationism very much. Although he was without a doubt a decidedly critical analyst himself, he always looked out for productive interdisciplinary connectivities by continuously reanimating « the *will of acknowledgement* towards other's achievements » (Bühler, 2000, 15). This synthetic aspiration basically shines through in all of Bühler's works. Still, it is presumably conveyed most clearly in his *Krise* which traces both an intertheoretical and an intermethodological path at the outset. In this book, Bühler deals with the most influential psychological schools of his time, which were: a) Freud's *psychoanalysis* or *experiential psychology*, b) the American tradition of *behaviourism*, and c) the so-called *humanistic psychology* or *psychology of thought*. As Bühler points out, each approach focuses on distinct psychological aspects. Whereas psychoanalysis explores the realm of individual *experience* (the *Erlebnisaspekt*), behaviourism scrutinises the observable scope of goal-oriented and meaningful *behaviour* (the *Verhaltensaspekt*). Finally, humanistic psychology analyses the extent to which the aspects of experience and behaviour correlate « *with the structures of the objective mind* » (*ibid.*, 49) (the *Denkaspekt*).

Unlike the majority of his fellow psychologists, Bühler demanded that these three psychological aspects should not be treated separately from each other. Even though he admitted that experiential psychology, behaviourism, and humanistic psychology are all concerned with distinct objects of investigation, he vigorously challenged the idea that any of the three psychological aspects could be able to solve the problems of academic

psychology all alone. The psychological life of man, he insisted, could only be fully comprehend if one realised that the formations of the human mind as well as the motives of human behaviour are always intertwined with the three aspects of experience, action, and cognition. As he says in a central passage of the *Krise*: « I propose the thesis that each of the three aspects is possible and that none of them are dispensable within the one science of psychology » (*ibid.*, 49). What the *Krise* is driving at, then, is nothing less than the attempt to unify the disparate field of academic psychology by presenting the three psychological aspects as utterly irreducible elements (*cf. ibid.*, chap. III). Every aspect, Bühler says, « demands the other two for its supplementation so that an enclosed system of scientific realisations can come about » (*ibid.*, 49). Accordingly, he who wants to overcome the inhibiting crisis of psychology simply has to acknowledge that psychology can only then examine its objects of scientific interest in a profound enough manner if the habit of pitting the three psychological aspects against each other is finally relinquished.

In Bühler's mind, no other object or phenomenon can demonstrate the necessity for a critical candidness towards the theoretical and methodical diversity of psychological research more plainly than language. As he repeatedly emphasised, the three psychological aspects are all operative within the realm of language. Hence, the *Erlebnisaspekt*, the *Verhaltens-aspekt*, and the *Denkaspekt* do not only serve as irreducible elements of psychology, they also function as three indispensable elements within the scope of the theory of language. Thus, Bühler postulated that the formulation of the axiomatics of psychology would inevitably entail the anticipation of the axiomatics of language as well.

It is exactly this idea which makes up a principal theoretical core of Bühler's *Krise*. After critically examining the works of psychologists who hypostasise one of the three psychological aspects,[6] Bühler puts forward three axioms that are supposed to bring forth a « new axiomatic » of psychology *and* the theory of language. These axioms are of particular importance because they promise to establish an integrative and thorough foundation of academic psychology; they are also extraordinarily significant because they implicate several considerations that are of great semiotic, linguistic, and anthropological interest. As can be seen in the upcoming quotation, Bühler's axiomatics is able to feature these diverse implications

[6] This critical examination especially concerns Wilhelm Wundt's theory of language. Contrary to Bühler, who advocated a threefold conception of language, Wundt (similar to Darwin) regarded the aspect of expression (the *Ausdrucksaspekt*) as the most crucial attainment of language (*cf.* Bühler, 2000, 50-68). As will be seen in the following pages, Bühler considered this particular view just as reductionistic as behaviourism's inclination to disregard the insights about the regularities of human cognition which were revealed by humanistic psychology.

primarily due to its foundation on a primacy of sociality. Bühler's account of psychology does not proceed from the insulated, self-absorbed, or withdrawn individual. On the contrary, it deals with individuals who first and foremost subsist as social beings which are constantly interrelating with each other. Academic psychology, therefore, cannot rely on conceptions that privilege the method of intuition and introspection alone.[7] But let us now allow Bühler to speak for himself:

> « I. Wherever real communal life exists, there has to be mutual guidance of the communal member's goal-oriented behaviour. Where the direction points of guidance are not given within the shared situation of perception, they have to be mediated through a contact of higher order, through specific semantic devices. […]
>
> II. Should the personal needs and moods of the individuals, who are involved in a communal act, supposed to be exerted within mutual guidance, they need to come to expression and impression. […]
>
> III. By means of assigning signs of expression to objects and states of affairs, they gain a new dimension of meaning. As well as an incalculable increase of their capacity as a means of communication. […] » (*ibid.*, 71)

This list of fundamental principles is of course susceptible to a vast number of explanatory interpretations. Yet, I am going to emphasise solely four aspects which – in my mind and against the background of the present essay's intentions – turn out to be most important:

i) As the three axioms demonstrate, Bühler perceived psychology as a « science of meaningful life » (*ibid.*, 28). He presupposed that psychological states or phenomena are steadily accompanied by specific motivations, needs, desires, intentions, demands, sentiments, etc. which are consistently brought forward, provoked, or found within communal life. Besides, he postulated that the uncircumventable outgrowths of communality – i.e., interaction and communication – are prevalent in every single axiom (for this reason, it is not surprising that Bühler is often appreciated as a classic of communication theory as well[8]). Thus, the ongoing range of sociality brings about the integration of all three psychological aspects. Any process of interaction or communication necessarily comprises what is at the centre of the particular axioms. On the one hand, it involves the mutual exertion of influence on the internal and external experiences and behaviours of those individuals who participate in what Bühler calls « real communal life ». The first axiom, then, accentuates what lies within the scope of those psychological conceptions which focus on the behaviouristic aspect of

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[7] This conclusion displays a self-critical component as well, for in his earlier career, Bühler was a pioneering representative of introspection himself (*cf.* Bühler, 1907, 1908a, 1908b).

[8] *Cf.*, for instance, Ungeheuer, 1967, Eschbach, 1990, Eschbach, Kapitzky, 2000, 249.

« mutual guidance » (the *Verhaltensaspekt*). On the other hand, the second axiom brings into view that any process of "mutual guidance" is powered or affected by specific « personal needs and moods ». According to Bühler, it is unimaginable to appeal to another individual's attitudes, motives, beliefs, and behaviour without simultaneously being impelled by certain needs, wants, desires, or other sensitivities, which all comprehend the working sphere of experiential psychology and – by implication – the second psychological aspect (the *Erlebnisaspekt*). Finally, the third axiom sheds light on the cognitive conditions that run those forms of interaction or communication which do not operate within a « shared situation of perception ». Whenever the causes, motivations, and guidelines of « mutual guidance » are not instantaneously perceptible, it is – for the sake of a preferably successful execution of communal interaction – inevitable to have recourse to cognitive capacities which enable the respective individuals to virtually transcend the immediate here and now. Since these cognitive capacities call for highly elaborated forms of abstraction (*cf*. segment iii), Bühler assigns the third axiom to the sphere of humanistic psychology which is primarily concerned with the *Denkaspekt*.

ii) Adepts of Bühler's *Theory of Language* will very probably notice that the cited axioms anticipate the organon model of language. The basic idea of the organon model is derived from Plato's seminal dialogue *Cratylus* in which it is claimed « that language is an *organum* [a *tool*] for the one to inform the other of something about the things » (Bühler, 1990, 30, ST, 24, TL, 104)[9]. As Bühler further points out, « [t]he list *the one – to the other – about the things* names no fewer than three relational foundations » (*ibid.*, 30f., ST, 24, TL, 104). These include a) a *speaker* or *sender* (*the one*), b) a *hearer* or *receiver* (*the other*), and c) the *objects* or *states of affairs* that are linguistically referred to (*the things*). Bühler insisted that these three elements are inseparably bound to each other. At the same time, he conceded that the organon model displays « three largely independently variable semantic relations » (*ibid.*, 35, ST, 28, TL, 110). Any of the three relational foundations, he claimed, may be highlighted differently in the course of linguistic interaction. A linguistic phenomenon does not only bear a relation with the objects or states of affairs which make up the subjects of a linguistically generated contact between a speaker and a hearer; its range and agency is also connected with and dependent on the individual sensitivities and orientations of the senders and receivers of linguistically submitted messages (*cf*. Veltruský, 1984, 161). Thus, the scope of language is essentially threefold: Regarded from an ideal-typical perspective, a linguistic

[9] In the rest of this article the following acronyms are used : ST (*Sprachtheorie*) to refer to the German edition by Bühler (1934), and TL (*Théorie du langage*) to refer to the French translation (2009).

phenomenon may a) take on an *expressive function* (*Ausdrucksfunktion*) insofar as it enunciates the current state of mind or sentience of its sender; it may b) take on an *appealing function* (*Appellfunktion*) insofar as it calls on a hearer or receiver to respond (both internally and externally) to the respective linguistic phenomenon in a requested or desired manner; or it may c) take on a *representational function* (*Darstellungsfunktion*) insofar as it is predominantly performed in order to signify the objects or states of affairs that are subjected to linguistic communication.

Although Bühler appreciated language first and foremost due to its representational capacities, because he believed that only this particular linguistic characteristic would enable individuals to also address objects and states of affairs which transcend the perceptible here and now of a specific communal interaction (*cf.* segments iii and iv below), this trisection of the potentiality of language clearly demonstrates that he ultimately (and contrary to numerous theorists of language and communication who traditionally privilege the speaker or the sender in a much too one-sided fashion[10]) advocated a *dynamic* model of language and communication as well (*cf.* Ungeheuer, 1967). As he says in his *Theory of Language*:

> « It is not true that the term 'things' or the more adequate conceptual pair 'objects and states of affairs' captures everything for which the sound is a mediating phenomenon, a mediator between the speaker and the hearer. Rather, each of the two participants has his own position in the make-up of the speech-situation, namely the sender as the agent, as the *subject* of the speech action on the one hand, and the receiver as the one spoken to, as the *addressee* of the speech action on the other hand. They are not simply a part of what the message is about, rather they are the partners in an exchange, and ultimately this is the reason why it is possible that the sound as a medial product has a specific significative relationship to each, to the one and to the other severally. » (Bühler, 1990, 37f., ST, 30, TL, 112, translation slightly modified)

Once again, the tri-relative (and thus dynamic) character of language is already sketched out within the axiomatics of the *Krise* (*cf.* again Ungeheuer, 1967). As the first axiom centres upon the cybernetic *Verhaltensaspekt* – the aspect of « mutual guidance » –, it corresponds with the *Appellfunktion*: both concepts point at the need or intention to guide or influence another individual's behaviour. The second axiom addresses the *Erlebnisaspekt* so that it parallels the *Ausdrucksfunktion*: the postulated « need to come to expression and impression » in order to be able to bring forth one's « personal needs and moods » clearly requires the expressive

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[10] In addition to Wundt's reductionist focus on the expressive function of language (*cf.* note 10 above), Bühler names Plato as one of the philosophers who merely concentrated on the representational function of language (*cf.* Bühler, 1990, 36, ST, 29f., TL, 110 suiv.).

function of language. Finally, the *Denkaspekt* of the third axiom coincides with the *Darstellungsfunktion*: only the representational facet of language allows individuals to put forth processes of « mutual guidance » in which its participants, intentional objects and states of affairs or other influencing variables cannot be located or embraced within a « shared situation of perception ».

iii) A similar observation can be made in regard to the semiotic foundation of Bühler's theory of language. Bühler resolutely stipulated « that the object of the sciences of language completely pertains to sematology[11] in the same way as the object of physics pertains to mathematics » (Bühler, 1990, 52, ST, 44, TL, 128). Language, he repeatedly declared, is « significative through and through » (*ibid.*, 40, ST, 33, TL, 114); it is « a system of signs » insofar as a sender exposes « sounds of language as signs » which are consecutively « *received as signs by a hearer* » so that « the language phenomenon acts as a mediator between the individuals » who are involved in a semiotically consolidated process of communication (all quotations taken from Bühler, 1933, 24)[12]. Semiotics, then, constitutes the foundation of any theory of language or communication. As such, the scope of semiotics is likewise prevalent in the axiomatics of the *Krise*. Whereas the *Appellfunktion* is accompanied by *signals* which obtain the rank of a sign « by virtue of [their] appeal to the hearer, whose inner or outer behaviour [they] direct as do other communicative signs » (Bühler, 1990, 35, ST, S. 28, TL, 109), the *Ausdrucksfunktion* is attended by *symptoms* which may serve as a sign « by virtue of [their] dependence on the sender, whose inner states [they] express » (*ibid.*). Finally, the *Darstellungsfunktion* is associated with *symbols* which are elevated to significative status « by virtue of [their] coordination to objects and states of affairs » (*ibid.*). Consequently, signals, symptoms, and symbols all revive what is at stake in the axiomatics of the *Krise*. The execution of processes of « mutual guidance » requires the presence of signalic signs just as much as the expression of « personal need

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[11] « Sematology » used to be Bühler's term of choice when he dealt with problems which are of semiotic relevance. His main reason for the usage of this (at least from a today's perspective) rather uncommon concept has to do with the desire to distance himself from Ferdinand de Saussure's « semiology » (*cf.* Bühler, 1933, 34).

[12] « That every language is a system of signs / that the sounds of language are taken as signs by the speaker, received as signs by the hearer / that the phenomenon of language appears as a mediator between the individuals within sign communication – one can start talking about language in such or in a similar manner. » (Bühler, 1933, 24) Bühler's definition of language as a « system of signs » is of course reminiscent of Ferdinand de Saussure's famous *Cours de linguistique générale*. Yet, Bühler thought that Saussure's *Cours* was too positivistic (*cf.* Bühler, 1990, 10, ST, S. 7, TL, 80-81). For further details about Bühler's and Saussure's semiotic conceptions and theories of language, *cf.* Koerner, 1984.

and moods » calls for the potency of symptomic signs.[13] Similarly, the assignment of signs towards « objects and states of affairs » is dependent on the use of symbolic signs. In Bühler's opinion, « [i]t is thus correct to say that according to the teaching of the organon model of language, phenomena [of language] must be regarded as *many-sided*, and […] as *many-levelled* significative structures » (*ibid.*, 40, ST, S. 33, TL, 116). The postulated dynamic character of language is by this means reflected by Bühler's sematology as well.

iv) Let us now come to the most important aspect of the present explanatory listing: Bühler's *Krise* is not alone of great relevance because it may be regarded as a decisive forerunner of the *Theory of Language*; it also deserves strict attention for it most plainly indicates the extent to which both the theory of language and semiotics may help to understand the exceptional position of man. In fact, the axiomatics of the *Krise* represents a teleological graduation which claims the ability to point out the dividing line between animal and man. On one side, Bühler elucidates that the aspects of « mutual guidance » and « expression and impression » – the first two axioms of the *Krise* – may be observed similarly within animal and human communal life. On the other side, he suggests that the symbolic « *Denkaspekt* » – the third axiom – is entirely human. « In the animal kingdom », Bühler writes,

> « semantics has two basic functions, two dimensions of meaning in common with human language, and it lacks (as far as we know today) the third. We find there and here the communal-bearing, the social function of semantics as well as the expression, the impression of experience. But nowhere [do we find] the third, language or gestures as means of representation of objects and states of affairs. » (Bühler, 2000, 68)

Accordingly, animals are conceded to be able to make use of appealing and expressive signs;[14] at the same time, they are thought of being incapable of using symbolic signs.

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[13] Bühler did not use the term « symptom » in the *Krise*. Instead, he spoke of « indicative signs » (*Anzeichen*) (*cf.* Bühler, 2000, 97ff.).

[14] Bühler explains this assumption in a more differentiated manner in his *Theory of Language*. There, he distinguishes the non-interpretive, automatic, or instinctive response to signals from the intentional production of more complex signs: « […] in my opinion, all forms of learning, ranging from those encountered in the infusoria to human learning, involve, in addition to everything else, objectively detectable reactions to *signals*; indeed, it is a defining characteristic of the psychophysical system of animals that it functions as a receiver and user of signals on a lower or an a higher level. » (Bühler, 1990, 44, ST, 38, TL, 121) With respect to the intentional production of signs Bühler further writes that « the biological source of the *production* of signs can be found at precisely the point when in the higher community life of animals a social situation demands an *expansion of the horizon* by means of joint perception » (*ibid.*). To put it in words that are taken from the *Krise*: « […] the origin of semantics » is not to be located « by the individual but by the

According to Bühler, the peculiarity of symbolic signs is as follows (*cf. ibid.*, 73ff.): Unlike signals and symptoms, symbols particularly feature three characteristics which – as a whole – are assumed to be distinctive of the human use of signs. On the one hand, Bühler considers symbols as *self-generated* signs, i.e., the users of symbolic signs are supposed to be able to refer to present and absent objects and states of affairs without having to resort to extraneously-generated sign vehicles. On the other hand, he describes symbols as signs which are eminently *dematerialised* (*entstofflicht*) and *detachable* (*ablösbar*) from the objects and states of affairs they refer to. This ascription is not to say that symbols are *entirely* immaterial; it rather accentuates that the semantic potency of symbolic signs is in no way motivated by a physical connection between the sign and the signified object. Symbols are by no means 'imprints' of the things they stand for, nor do they mirror or picture reality; what they do, instead, is to represent objects and states of affairs in an *ideational* manner which is uniquely human.[15]

Bühler exemplifies the exceptionalism of the symbolic sign by contrasting it with the *matter-bound* (*stoffgebunden*) guidance of behaviour as it is observable within the realm of bee-communities (*cf. ibid.*, 72ff.). Bees, he suggests, can only inform their conspecifics about the location of a feeding site, for instance, by carrying a *material sample* (*Stoffprobe*) of the respective object of signification with them.[16] For this reason, Bühler believes that bees – or animals in general – are not able not maintain processes of « mutual guidance » without continuous recurrence to matter-bound signs, i.e., signs which – unlike symbols – are *not* detachable from the objects and states of affairs they stand for. For Bühler, this consistent material fixedness denies animals the chance to develop or acquire a full-fledged language. Thus, he believed that the possibility to compare animal interaction with human language could only then be provided if animals were also able to express their « mnemonic impressions to other conspecifics *without requiring somewhat of the old material sample again* » (*ibid.*, 73).

What this example is supposed to prove may be paraphrased as follows: The idea that man is primarily to be regarded as a linguistic animal initially implies the more fundamental idea that man is first and foremost to be regarded as a symbolic animal. Human language essentially requires symbolicity, for only symbols set up the basis for the unique representational

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community »; it is « not a by-product but a *constitutive factor* of any animal or human communal life » (Bühler, 2000, 59, *cf.* Ungeheuer, 1967, 44).

15 In reference to Georg Simmel's philosophy of money, Bühler characterises the level of symbolicity as a *Wendung zur Idee*, a « *turn towards the idea* » (Bühler, 2000, 75).

16 I shall not comment on whether or not Bühler's discussion of the nature of animal communication is still valid. What is at stake here is simply his semiotic and anthropological argumentation.

function of language. Therefore, Bühler's sematology accomplishes much more than a semiotic foundation of his theory of language; after all, it provides a semiotic theory about the nature of man as well.

3. CASSIRER'S CONCEPTION OF MAN AS *ANIMAL SYMBOLICUM*

It is hardly surprising that especially Bühler's latter remarks about the symbolic peculiarity of man suggest a substantial conformity with Cassirer's famous notion of man as *animal symbolicum*. The fact that Bühler and Cassirer often referred to each other's works in an overly approving manner reinforces this impression; so does the circumstance that both scholars occasionally made use of a similar or identical terminology. To give an example: Bühler assured that Cassirer's explanations of the relation between « word and sentence […] coincide perfectly » (Bühler, 1990, 87, n. 6, ST, 74, TL, 169) with his own thoughts on that topic. Cassirer, on the other hand, admitted that there is a « fundamental agreement » (Cassirer, 1966, 110, n. 4, PSF 3, 128, PFS 3, 130) between his and Bühler's use of the term *Darstellungsfunktion*. Furthermore, he explicitly referred to Bühler's *Krise* (and – in this connection – especially to his illustration of matter-bound animal communication) in order to affirm that « the particularity and the characteristic meaning and value of human speech » (*ibid.*, 333, PSF 3, 388, PFS 3, 368) is constituted by the dematerialised and detachable nature of the symbolic sign.[17] After all is said and done, when it comes to the specificity and functionality of language, Bühler and Cassirer coincide almost completely.

And yet: Does this obvious harmony necessarily imply that Bühler's and Cassirer's reflections about semiotics, symbolicity, and the essence of man are in perfect agreement with each other? At first sight, one might be tempted to answer this question in the affirmative; but still – and as will be demonstrated in the course of the following two segments –, a closer inspection of Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms will reveal that Bühler's philosophical companion advocated a broader and more general conception of symbolicity.

i) Proponents of Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms quite rightly allege that the cultural- and life-philosophical implications of his thinking go well beyond traditional transcendentalism. Nevertheless, the basic motives of a Kantian critique of knowledge are perpetually prevailing within Cassirer's philosophical investigations (*cf.* Hendel, 1955, 21-35). Just

[17] Subsequent to a quotation taken from Bühler's *Krise*, Cassirer states: « It is these two factors taken together – the step from the material sample to the genuine sign and the essential detachability of the sign from the things for which it functions as a sign – which constitute the particularity and the characteristic meaning and value of human speech. » (*ibid.*, 333, PSF 3, S. 388, PFS 3, 368)

like Kant, Cassirer tried to understand the extent to which « the mere diversity of existing things » (Cassirer, 1975, 76, PSF 1, 7, PFS 1, 17)[18] may be converted into a « unity of being » (*ibid.*); unlike Kant – and, incidentally, quite similar to Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy of pragmatism –, Cassirer explored the conditions of the possibility of knowledge with the objective of reconstructing the « changing », not the « stationary » nature of man (Cassirer, 1996, 36). As a result, he championed a dynamic model of knowledge by steadily stressing the processual character of human cognition which he believed to be able to pave the way for a comprehensive transformation of Kant's « critique of reason » into a « critique of culture » (*cf.* Cassirer, 1975, 80, PSF 1, 11, PFS 1, 20).

Cassirer assertively introduced his transformation of Kantianism in terms of a decidedly semiotic undertaking. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, he explained, takes for granted that the sign

> « […] is no mere accidental cloak of the idea, but its necessary and essential organ. It serves not merely to communicate a complete and given thought-content, but is an instrument, by means of which this content develops and fully defines itself. The conceptual definition of a content goes hand in hand with its stabilization in some characteristic sign. Consequently, all truly strict and exact thought is sustained by the *symbolic* and *semiotics* on which it is based. » (*ibid.*, 86, PSF 1, 18, PFS 1, 27)

Just like in Peirce's semiotic theory of cognition, Cassirer elaborated a semiotics in which the concept of the sign functions as the most crucial element of any knowledge-abetting synthesis. For Cassirer, to determine or categorise something *as* something particular necessarily implies the effectuality of signs and symbols, respectively. Therefore, every process of objective knowledge is considered to be entirely dependent on the epistemological and semiotic impact of symbolism.[19] Accordingly, Cassirer presupposed a general mediacy of cognition which he, amongst other things, primarily put forward to strictly oppose any « naïve *copy theory* of knowledge » (*ibid.*, 75, PSF 1, 5, PFS 1, 15). As is outlined in the introductory remarks of the *Phenomenology of Knowledge*:

> « We never find naked sensation as a raw material to which some form is given: all that is tangible and accessible to us is rather the concrete determinacy, the living multiformity, of a world of perception, which is dominated

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[18] In the rest of article the following acronyms are used : PSF (*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen 1*, *2* or *3*) to refer to the German edition of the three volumes by Cassirer, and PFS 1, 2 or 3 (*Philosophie des formes symboliques*) to refer to the French translation (1972).

[19] « For consciousness the sign is, as it were, the first stage and the first demonstration of objectivity, because through it the constant flux of the contents of consciousness is for the first time halted, because in it something enduring is determined and emphasized » (Cassirer, 1975, 89, PSF 1, 22, PFS 1, 31).

> and permeated through and through by definite modes of formation. » (Cassirer, 1966, 14f., PSF 3, 18, PFS 3, 27)

Cassirer not only conceived these « modes of formation » as entirely symbolic; he also associated the symbolic or semiotic foundation of knowledge with the effectiveness of an « original imaginative power » (Cassirer, 1975, 88, PSF 1, 21, PFS 1, 30). Every « unity of being » – whether it is induced in perception or in thought – is considered the result of a symbolic formation which is by no means restricted to a single-sided and static schematism. Neither is « [t]he Philosophy of Symbolic Forms […] concerned exclusively or even primarily with the purely scientific, exact conceiving of the world », nor does it hold that « the 'understanding' of the world » is proceeding passively – i.e., in the form of a « mere receiving » or in the sense of a sheer « repetition of a given structure of reality » (all quotations from Cassirer, 1966, 13, PSF 3, 16f., PFS 3, 25-26). Instead, the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms takes for granted that the human understanding of the world « comprises a free activity of the spirit » (*ibid.*) which is open to a plurality of symbolically shaped « world views » (Cassirer, 1968, 29, PSF 2, 39, PFS 2, 49).

According to Cassirer, the task of a Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is to analyse and reconstruct the manifold outgrowths of exactly this essentially free and formative activity. Consequently, « [t]he Philosophy of Symbolic Forms […] is concerned with all the forms assumed by man's understanding of the world » (Cassirer, 1966, 13, PSF 3, 16, PFS 3, 25-26); it

> « starts from the assumption that such [symbolic] categories must be at work wherever a cosmos, a characteristic and typical world view, takes form out of the chaos of impressions » (Cassirer, 1968, 29, PSF 2, 39, PFS 2, 49).

As John Michael Krois accurately posits, Cassirer's philosophy is thus « not merely yet another way of understanding the world, but a theory of understanding the world in the first place » (Krois, 1988, 21). It is, otherwise put, just as much a theory of cognition as it is a theory of meaning.

As such, the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is also designed to function as a philosophy of man. « In fact », Cassirer claimed,

> « we can […] predict that the fundamental answer to the question of the 'essential concept' of mankind […] can come only from a philosophy of 'symbolic forms'. For these forms indicate to us the level of intelligence in human action, and they contain the universal defining elements of this level. » (Cassirer, 1996, 38f.)

The diversity of symbolic forms (myth, religion, art, language, science, etc.) displays that man « does not have an immediate but a mediate relation to reality, and this mediation is the very condition and the very principle of his life » (Cassirer, 2005, 260). Other than animals, human

beings do not immediately respond to outward stimuli. Instead, they are constantly « constructing artificial worlds » (*ibid.*) by « wrapping [reality] in certain signs and symbols – in the words of language, in mythical tales, in artistic or religious images » (*ibid.*). Thus, if philosophy tries to

> « follow up, step by step, the gradual evolution that leads from the first dawnings of symbolic thought to its achievement, to its most perfect and refined forms[,] […] we may hope […] to come to a philosophical concept of man that comprises the whole of his fundamental faculties and his most characteristic activities » (*ibid.*, 251).

Of course, the present essay does not have enough room to trace every single symbolic form that was once examined by Cassirer.[20] However, what matters here can be gleaned even without a detailed inspection of Cassirer's extensive explanations about the «'polydimensionality' of the intellectual[21] world » (Cassirer, 1966, 13, PSF 3, 17, PFS 3, 26), for what is of prime importance in the remarks at hand is the idea that – according to Cassirer – any form of understanding the world is to be regarded as entirely symbolic. What Cassirer's discourse about the potency of the symbol principally amounts to is the attempt to demonstrate that « any specific sphere of symbols and signs – may these involve linguistic or mythical, artistic or intellectual signs – is always backed by particular *energies* of formation » (Cassirer, 1923, 200). Thus, « [t]o divest oneself of the sign not only in this or that but in any form would imply the destruction of these energies simultaneously » (*ibid.*).

Cassirer did not hide the fact that his talk of « particular *energies* of formation » is substantially derived from Wilhelm von Humboldt's influential theory of language. At the same time, he found that « [t]he saying of Humboldt that Language is to be treated not as an εργον but as an ενέργεια – not as an achieved work but as an energy – […] is not restricted to language alone; it may be applied in the same sense to art, to religion, to science » (Cassirer, 2005, 211), or to any other symbolic form.

By this means, Cassirer intended to highlight the active, energetic, and productive character of all symbol-bound processes of knowledge. Different than Bühler, who took the concept of the symbol pre-eminently as the by far most efficient and productive means of (preferably linguistic) communication, he regarded the idea of symbolism as an absolutely indispensable and uncircumventable reality-developing device. Neither is it to his mind

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[20] Krois registers that Cassirer mentioned the following outgrowths of man's understanding of the world as individual symbolic forms : myth, language, technology, law, art, religion, science, history, and – at least once – economy (*cf.* Krois, 1988, 19).

[21] The English translation mistakenly speaks of a « 'polydimensionality' of the cultural world », whereas the German original reads « die 'Mehrdimensionalität' der geistigen Welt » (Cassirer, 1929, 17).

possible to attain objective knowledge which is *not* based on the above mentioned « particular energies » of symbolism, nor is it conceivable that the knowledge-abetting effectiveness of symbolism can ever be left behind; for what Cassirer's symbolism introduces into the operating range of epistemology is – among other things – first and foremost a general and universal *Gestalt principle* which was similarly endorsed by Bühler within the framework of his psychological investigations (*cf*. Bühler, 1913, 1960).[22] As Cassirer critically directed towards the metaphysics of Henri Bergson's philosophy of life (*cf*. Cassirer, 1966, 36, PSF 3, 43, PFS 3, 50), any objective conception of something *as* something particular ultimately rests on a primacy of symbolic mediation; «[…] all fact», Cassirer concluded in accordance with Goethe, « is in itself theory » (*ibid.*, 25, PSF 3, 31, PFS 3, 39), for it is impossible to ever perceive or recognise an entity which would be given as an entirely « formless » object (*cf*. Cassirer, 1927, 99).

Although Cassirer admitted that the individual methods of thought, which are displayed in the spheres of myth, religion, art, language, or scientific knowledge, appear to have nothing in common at first sight, he put considerable emphasis on the idea that any specific form of objective knowledge is guided by a symbol-bound « structural principle » (Cassirer, 1966, 13, PSF 3, 17, PFS 3, 26) which is assumed to be « operative and dominant in each particular sphere » (*ibid.*) of human life and action. What unifies the undeniably and decisively peculiar « world views », which are prevalent within myth, religion, art, language, science, etc., is the factuality of their commonly shared symbolic or semiotic foundation. As Cassirer noted in his 1941/42 « Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language »:

> « We do not deny the strong oppositions, nay, the contradictions and antinomies that appear in the development of human thought and human culture. But we think that in spite of this there is not only an enmity but a close relationship between the fundamental functions that constitute our mental and cultural life. They are, so to speak, different branches on the tree of knowledge; and all these branches are nourished by a common root. But we must not content ourselves with such metaphorical expressions. We must try to indicate this common basis by finding out a general trait that is a condition and a prerequisite of art and religion, of language and science. I have tried to designate this general condition by introducing the term *symbolic form*. » (Cassirer, 2005, 246)

Even though Cassirer expressly underlined that he did « not wish to insist upon this name » (*ibid.*), he firmly contended that a thorough investigation of the basic elements of human thought and cultural life inevitably

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[22] Krois complains about the circumstance that the significance of « Cassirer's affiliation to Gestalt theory […] has up to now been hardly realised » (Krois, 1988, 24).

implies an elaborate study of the generic symbolic constitution of human understanding. As a result, he vindicated a conception of symbolicity which is significantly more fundamental than both Bühler's notion of the symbol and his semiotic or symbolic conception of man. As is plainly displayed by the axiomatics of the *Krise*, Bühler conceived the concept of the sign in general as well as the concept of the symbol in particular as a means of interaction and communication in the first place. Moreover, he mainly went back to semiotics (or in his words: to sematology) for the purpose of formulating a general theory of language. In this context, the concept of symbol represented the highest and most elaborated form of signification which finally opens the door to the establishment of a full-fledged language that is primarily characterised by its *Darstellungsfunktion*.

Cassirer, however, reflected on the functionality of symbolism for the sake of clarifying the forces which stimulate and facilitate any process of objective knowledge. Thus, what is of prime philosophical interest to him is not – as is expressed in the axiomatics of the « *Krise* » – the extent to which signs or symbols may serve as a means of mutual guidance and understanding; what he was concerned with the most is rather « the problem of knowledge » (Cassirer, 1966, xiii, PSF 3, V, PFS, 7) in general. Within the framework of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, this problem goes beyond the scope of the problem of language. Thus, Cassirer poses the question of meaning in a more general or fundamental manner as well. Albeit the phenomenon of language is without doubt allotted a quite important role within the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (*cf.* Göller, 1988), Cassirer ascribed symbolism a value which exceeds Bühler's idea about the representational function of language. « Not only the realm of conceptual thinking », Cassirer stated, but also « those of intuition and perception are […] conditioned » (Cassirer, 1966, 48, PSF 3, 57, PFS, 62) by symbolism, whereas it should be added that Cassirer – once again just like Peirce and, at the same time, unlike many contemporary philosophers – did *not* subordinate the aspects of intuition and perception to language (*cf.* Krois, 2004, 16).

ii) The ubiquity of symbolicity within any form of intuition, perception, and conceptual thought also shines through in Cassirer's effort to describe the most striking kinds of sign processes by introducing the triad of *expression* (*Ausdruck*), *representation* (*Darstellung*), and *pure significance* (reine Bedeutung) (*cf.* Cassirer, 1927). As our preceding remarks have shown, Cassirer candidly borrowed the notion of the *Darstellungsfunktion* from Bühler's theory of language (*cf.* also Krois, 2004, 27). Moreover, he was convinced that the unique potentiality of language cannot be comprehended unless its inclination towards the *Darstellungsaspekt* is taken note of. Language « as a whole», he argued, « is only then constituted and

completed » if the level of pure expression is exceeded by attaining the level of representation (Cassirer, 1927, 102)[23].

But still, Cassirer's agreement with the basic assumptions of Bühler's theory of language does not imply that he understood the sensual facets of the *Ausdrucksaspekt* in terms of an entirely non-symbolic form of meaning. On the contrary, he thought that the function of expression is just as much symbolic as the functions of representation and pure significance, for in his opinion, all of them are to be understood as definite modes of formation. Therefore, Cassirer's notion of the symbol does not amount to representation alone. From his point of view, the symbol is not – as the third axiom of the *Krise* insinuates – solely a representative for the highest form of cognition and communication, but rather a key element of any form of cognition and behaviour.

Yet, Cassirer saw – quite similar to Bühler – his triad of expression, representation, and pure significance in terms of a teleological sequence. According to him, the transition from expression to representation and from representation to pure significance clearly illustrates a gradual progress of abstraction. Whereas the idea of expression refers to the most fundamental and essentially sense-orientated species of symbolism in which the sign is in no way as dematerialised and detached from its objects as is the case in Bühler's theory of symbol and Cassirer's notion of representation, the aspect of pure significance designates the most abstract level of cognition and signification since it is characterised by a purely relational and ideational connection with its objects and states of affairs. The sphere of pure significance, Cassirer writes, « is divided from the sphere of representation, because it has detached itself from the ground of intuitive formation in which representation is rooted and from which it forth and forth extracts its greatest powers » (*ibid.*, 101). On the level of pure significance, he continues, the sign « floats in the free ether of pure thought » (*ibid.*), it « does not express and represent anything – it is a sign in terms of a purely abstract *coordination* » (*ibid.*).

Of course, it is open to dispute whether the notion of pure significance is able to capture facts which are not already encompassed by Bühler's *Darstellungsfunktion*. Still, Cassirer seemed to be sure that his idea of pure significance is more apt to embrace what he assumed to be especially characteristic for the symbolic capacity of scientific and speculative thought. Furthermore, he continuously conceded that the faculty of pure significance

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[23] « […] there can be no doubt about the extent to which language, from its primitive forms up to its highest stages, is based on pure expression and how strongly it is rooted in it. […] On the other hand, it cannot be questioned that this only touches on a single aspect and, so to speak, a single dimension of linguistic expression, and that language as a whole constitutes and completes itself only by going beyond this aspect. » (Cassirer, 1927, 102)

can never be established independent of the function of representation (which is – in turn – based on the aspect of expression itself). To his mind, the usage of purely relational (e.g., mathematical, logical, geometrical, etc.) signs inevitably requires the former ability to bring forth representative signs, for it is representation in general and language in particular which « was the first to open to man the way to scientific and speculative thought […] » (Cassirer, 2005, 277).

The teleological character of the triad « expression – representation – pure significance » suggests that the study of the diverse outcomes of the symbolic foundation of human understanding finally leads to a cultural-philosophical reconstruction of those fundamental elements which are most dominant in man's intellectual history. As Cassirer registers:

> « The surpassing of a particular [symbolic] form is made possible not by the vanishing, the total destruction, of this form but by its preservation within the continuity of consciousness as a whole; for what constitutes the unity and totality of the human spirit is precisely that it has no absolute past; it gathers up into itself what has passed and preserves it as present. » (Cassirer, 1966, 78, PSF 3, 92, PFS 3, 95)

Cassirer thought that it is impossible to efface residues of former symbolic forms. Furthermore, he argued that the innovation, reformation, and revolution of novel symbolically formed « world views » can only be accomplished against the background of prior symbol-bound understandings of the world. According to him, this principle of preservation especially prevents a complete fading of mythical thought. « [W]e shall not be able to believe », Cassirer writes, « that even so strange and paradoxical a structure as mythical perception is totally lost or superfluous within the general view of reality which the theoretical consciousness [the consciousness of representation and pure significance] projects » (*ibid.*, PSF 3, 92f., PFS 3, 95). On the contrary, « [i]t is to be expected that the basic tendency that plainly dominates this perception will not be absolutely extinguished, however much it is crowded out and modified by other modes of being » (*ibid.*). From this it follows that even the most enlightened form of consciousness is unable to totally overcome the remains of mythical thought.

In this respect, Cassirer slightly differs from Bühler, who argued that the attainment of the *Darstellungsaspekt* would ultimately consolidate the representational momentousness of the so-called *principle of abstractive relevance*. Bühler assures that this principle « reveals the *differentia specifica* of the concept of sign » (Bühler, 1990, 50, ST, 42, TL 126), for it defines that – within the scope of a full-fledged language – it is not « the entire wealth of the properties of the sensual thing […] » which « enter[s] into the semantic function » of the sign, but rather « only this or that abstract factor [which] is relevant for its calling to function as a sign » (all citations

taken from *ibid.*, 52, ST, 44, TL, 127-128). Accordingly, the representative, dematerialised, or abstract sign is expected to finally free the human use of signs from those sense-oriented and matter-bound forms of signification – in Bühler's words: « [f]rom the mistake of the *material fallacy* on the one hand and from *magical theories* on the other hand » (*ibid.*, 54, ST, 46f., TL, 131) – which, according to Cassirer, can never be fully overcome.

Both scholars, of course, estimated the significance of mythical and purely abstract thought differently for good reasons. Even though Bühler's and Cassirer's reflections exhibit various obvious similarities (which primarily concern their respective notions about the specificity and functionality of language), one should always take note of the fact that, all in all, the two pursued different theoretical goals. Being a theorist of language in the first place, Bühler implements biological, anthropological, and semiotic insights first and foremost for the sake of constructing a general theory of language which he thought to be inextricably linked with a general theory of communication. Cassirer, however, did not only strive for a general theory of language; what he was engaged with is the attempt to present symbolism in its various forms as both a key element and a key problem of philosophical thought.

It goes without saying that the preceding remarks are overly fragmentary. Still, the present essay tried to demonstrate that a thorough reading of Bühler's and Cassirer's thought may show how far semiotics can be fruitfully intertwined with anthropology. Probably one of the most interesting and promising aspects which is worth being subjected to further comparative investigations is to be found in Cassirer's posthumous works. In a manuscript, which probably served as a preparatory work for the planned fourth volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer notes that Bühler's « division of 'language' into three basic aspects – expression, evocation, representation – […] refers to the three classes of basis phenomena » (Cassirer, 1996, 152) which Cassirer designated as « feeling» , « willing », and « thinking » (*cf. ibid.*) and, furthermore, distinguished to be « 'prior' to all thought and inference and […] the basis of both » (*ibid.*, 137).[24] This consideration is primarily of special interest because it suggests the drawing of yet another analogy which is otherwise not immediately comprehensible: As John Michael Krois posits, Cassirer's basis phenomena and Charles Sanders Peirce's famous three-part list of categories absolutely correspond with each other (*cf.* Krois, 2004). Now, if Krois's observation is

[24] Krois says that Cassirer's basis phenomena are widely « unknown because Cassirer's writings on the subject, written in the late 1930s and early 1940s, have only recently become available » (Krois, 2004, 20). Thus, the impact of the idea of basis phenomena on Cassirer's philosophy as well as its relation to other philosophical doctrines is still open for a multitude of thorough investigations.

correct, one would be entitled to argue that Bühler's threefold division of language corresponds with Peirce's three categories as well. However, I believe that all of the suggested conclusions by analogy require further inspections. Peirce's categories are presented as logical or phenomenological categories which are – at least in part – operative *prior* to specific social, intentional, interactive, and communicative variables. Thus, Peirce's list of categories does certainly not comprise what is at stake in Bühler's axiomatics. Since Cassirer explicitly related his three basis phenomena to Bühler's notion of language, it may not be promising to equate either conception with Peirce's much less preconditional account of human understanding. But this aspect, of course, touches upon a rather new and different topic which needs to be discussed in another essay.

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