

MICHAEL KUZNETSOV

SYMBOLIC FORMS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: ERNST CASSIRER'S PHILOSOPHY AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR MODERN CULTURE AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. Introduction: The Enduring Light of Cassirer's Cultural Philosophy

The rapid transformation of social communications in the digital era has profoundly altered the production, circulation, and experience of cultural meaning. Social media platforms, algorithmic curation, immersive virtual environments, and the global proliferation of digital symbols have simultaneously intensified symbolic density and rendered shared cultural narratives fragile. These developments raise pressing questions about identity, collective understanding, and the very constitution of social reality in an age of hyper-mediation and cultural pluralism.

The rapid transformation of social communications in the digital era has profoundly altered the production, circulation, and experience of cultural meaning. Social media platforms, algorithmic curation, immersive virtual environments, and the global proliferation of digital symbols have simultaneously intensified symbolic density and rendered shared cultural narratives fragile. These developments raise pressing questions about identity, collective understanding, and the very constitution of social reality in an age of hyper-mediation and cultural pluralism.

Yet the problem of how sensuous immediacy can become the bearer of lasting cultural meaning is not new. Western thought has grappled with it at least since the Renaissance Neoplatonic tradition (Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno), where beauty was understood as the inseparable triad: *Voluptas* – *Castitas* – *Pulchritudo*: sensuous attraction purified by spiritual chastity and realised in the absolute harmony of number and proportion. Here the symbol was not an arbitrary sign but a living emanation of divine light that made the invisible visible. This lineage runs from the Aristotelian *καλόν* (the beautiful as simultaneously noble and morally significant) through Alexander

Gottlieb Baumgarten's (1714-1762) founding definition of aesthetics as "*perfectio cognitionis sensitivae*" (the perfection of sensory cognition) to Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) "*interessenloses Wohlgefallen*" (disinterested pleasure), which finally freed aesthetic contemplation from utilitarian interest.

Precisely this centuries-long attempt to reconcile sensuous immediacy with spiritual distance and formal wholeness is radically rethought by Ernst Cassirer in his philosophy of symbolic forms.

For Cassirer, the symbolic function is not limited to art or aesthetics but is the universal mechanism by which human beings constitute a meaningful world. The old Renaissance triad is thereby secularised and generalised into three structural moments present in every symbolic form whatsoever:

1. *Voluptas* — the original sensuous intensity and affective grip of the material;
2. *Castitas* — the distancing or "disinterested" moment that liberates the material from mere utility or biological need;
3. *Pulchritudo* — the achieved inner form, the meaningful wholeness that emerges through symbolic pregnance (*symbolische Prägnanz*).

In Cassirer's framework, therefore, the aesthetic is no longer a separate "realm" but the paradigmatic instance of all cultural meaning-formation — from myth and language to science and, crucially, to the new digital-symbolic configurations of the present.

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms offers a robust and still underutilized framework for addressing these issues. Developed primarily in his three-volume *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929), Cassirer's central thesis posits that human beings are not merely biological or rational entities but *animal symbolicum*: beings who actively construct their worlds through autonomous systems of meaning-making — language, myth, art, religion, science, and history. Unlike structuralist approaches that treat signs as static oppositions or post-structuralist perspectives that dissolve meaning into infinite deferral, Cassirer's model is dynamic, systemic, and non-reductionist. It treats symbolic forms as historically evolving yet functionally differentiated domains that together constitute culture as an irreducible whole.

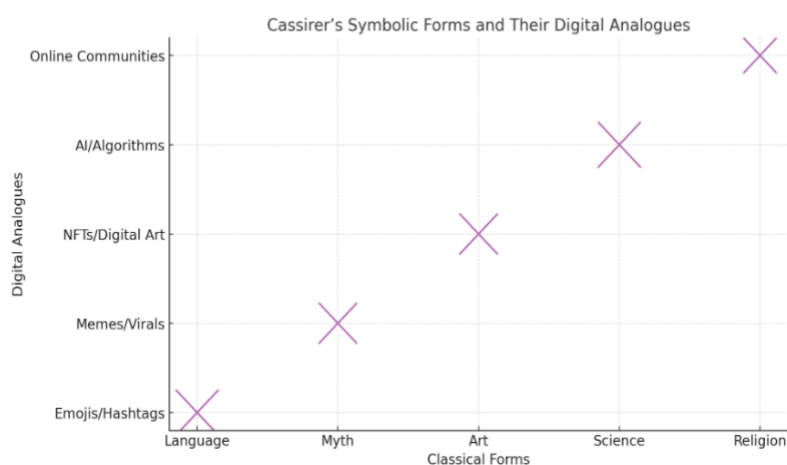
Although Cassirer's ideas have been applied to media theory (Krois 1998), aesthetic experience and intercultural communication (Meland et al. 2024), significant gaps remain. Contemporary scholarship has rarely engaged systematically with the specific challenges posed by algorithmic mediation, the hyper-symbolization characteristic of social media, or the atmospheric interplay between intimacy and immensity in digital environments. Moreover, the dominant paradigms in cultural analysis — whether materialist, structuralist, or postmodern — tend either to reduce symbolic processes to underlying economic or power structures or to abandon the possibility of coherent cultural synthesis altogether. Cassirer's framework, by contrast, provides a genuine third path: it preserves the autonomy and creativity of symbolic activity while maintaining the possibility of critical, interdisciplinary understanding.

This article addresses these lacunae by bringing Cassirer's philosophy into direct confrontation with contemporary digital culture. It argues that emojis, memes, algorithmic feeds, avatars and virtual architectures function as emergent symbolic forms that actively shape lived reality rather than merely representing it. The investigation proceeds through four interconnected steps.

1. First, it reconstructs Cassirer's core concepts of symbolic pregnance, functional differentiation, and the dialectical development of forms.
2. Second, it examines concrete instances of digital symbolism – from the condensed expressivity of emojis to the myth-making capacity of algorithmic personalization.
3. Third, it integrates phenomenological perspectives (Böhme, Pallasmaa, Merleau-Ponty) to analyze how these forms produce atmospheric mediators that blur boundaries between individual perception and collective environment.
4. Finally, it critically assesses the possibilities and limits of symbolic agency under conditions of algorithmic governance, proposing a Cassirer-inspired symbolic-pragmatic model that preserves human creative freedom without ignoring structural constraints.

Methodologically, the study combines hermeneutic interpretation of Cassirer's primary texts, comparative analysis with structuralist and constructivist theories (Lévi-Strauss, Goodman), historical-

philosophical reconstruction, critical discourse analysis of digital platforms, and phenomenological reflection on lived symbolic interaction in virtual spaces (Skidelsky 2011, 22-52).



Picture 1. Conceptual Diagram: Cassirer's Symbolic Forms and Digital Analogues.

This visualization maps Ernst Cassirer's classical symbolic forms (language, myth, art, science, religion) to their modern digital counterparts (emojis, memes, algorithms, etc.). The scatter plot highlights the strength of these connections, demonstrating how foundational cultural frameworks persist in digital spaces. For example, "myth" correlates with viral memes as contemporary narrative structures, while "science" aligns with algorithmic governance. The diagram underscores Cassirer's enduring relevance in analyzing digital culture.

To approach Ernst Cassirer is to enter a realm where philosophy becomes a mirror of human striving, reflecting not only the structures of thought but also the aspirations of societies. Cassirer's work, rooted in the Kantian tradition yet boldly expansive, seeks to understand culture not as a static edifice but as a living process, a ceaseless act of creation through which humanity interprets and constructs its reality. In an age marked by the clash of ideas and the rapid transformation of social bonds, Cassirer's philosophy offers a beacon of clarity, illuminating the pathways through which symbols bind us to one another and to the world. His insights resonate with particular urgency in the study of social communications, where the dynamics of meaning-making whether through ancient myths or modern media shape the contours of human coexistence.

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms offers a compelling framework for understanding atmospheres as dynamic processes of meaning-making. In the digital age, symbolic forms such as emojis, memes and algorithms function as atmospheric mediators, creating spaces that are both intimate: reflecting individual experiences and immense, spanning global networks of communication. Drawing on Gernot Böhme's (1937-2022) conception of atmospheres as neither wholly internal nor external, we can interpret Cassirer's symbolic forms as generative structures that radiate meaning, shaping the lived experience of digital spaces. For instance, memes, akin to modern myths, evoke collective emotional resonances, forming atmospheres that oscillate between personal engagement and universal dissemination.

This essay ventures to explore Cassirer's cultural legacy, tracing the threads of his thought through their philosophical and social implications. It examines how his concept of symbolic forms provides a lens for understanding the complexities of cultural expression, from the poetic cadences of art to the rigorous logic of science. It further considers the enduring relevance of his ideas in a world of digital interconnectedness and cultural pluralism, where the negotiation of meaning remains a central challenge. Finally, it acknowledges the scholars across Germany, France, Britain, and the United States who have carried forward Cassirer's vision, weaving his ideas into the fabric of contemporary thought. In this endeavor, we seek not merely to recount Cassirer's contributions but to engage with them as a living dialogue, one that speaks to the eternal human quest for understanding in a world shaped by symbols (pic. 1).

2. Cassirer's Concept of Symbolic Forms

At the heart of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy lies the idea that human beings are not merely rational animals but "symbolic animals" who create and inhabit a world of meaning through symbols. In his seminal work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer argued that human culture is constructed through various symbolic forms language, myth, art, religion, science, and history each representing a distinct mode of understanding and structuring reality (pic. 1). Unlike traditional Kantian philosophy, which focused on universal categories of perception, Cassirer extended this framework to emphasize the diversity of cultural expressions, each governed by its own internal logic (Andersch & Cutting 2014, 209-213).

For Ernst Cassirer, **symbolic forms are not mere representations of reality but active processes through which humans shape their world.** Language, for instance, is not only a tool for communication but a system that structures thought and social interaction. Similarly, myth and art provide frameworks for expressing human experiences that transcend empirical reality, while science offers a methodical approach to organizing knowledge. This perspective positions culture as a dynamic, creative process, deeply rooted in human agency and social interaction.

Cassirer's approach was groundbreaking in cultural studies because it provided a methodological framework for analyzing the multiplicity of human experience without reducing it to a single paradigm. By recognizing the autonomy and interdependence of symbolic forms, he offered a way to study culture as a complex, interconnected system, bridging philosophy and the social sciences. However, this very interdependence has often led contemporary readers to treat the different forms: language, myth, religion, science and art, as more or less equivalent domains of symbolisation. Such a symmetrical reading, useful as it is for introductory purposes, risks obscuring the fact that Cassirer himself granted art and aesthetic experience a privileged position within the entire architecture of symbolic forms. It is precisely this aesthetic core long marginalized in media-theoretical applications of Cassirer — that proves indispensable for understanding the expressive, atmospheric, and transformative power of digital symbols today.

3. Reclaiming the Aesthetic Core of Symbolic Forms

A decisive yet often overlooked aspect of Cassirer's philosophy is the central role of aesthetics within the system of symbolic forms. Samantha Matherne has shown that art is not merely one form among others but the privileged domain in which the dynamic, expressive, and "energetic" character of symbolisation becomes most visible (Matherne 2021, 156-178). I contend that: 1) Cassirer views art as a symbolic language, with images acting like verbal signs to structure meaningful content into cultural objects; 2) this process, alongside language, relies on «symbolic-poietic mimesis»; 3) a function synthesising imitation and construction (Filieri 2024, 361-363). For Ernst Cassirer, aesthetic experience reveals the fundamental process of symbolic pregnance (*Sinnbildung*) in its

purest form: the transformation of mere sensory impression into a meaningful, living Gestalt that is neither subjective nor objective but mediates between the two (Matherne 2021, 167). This insight is crucial for any contemporary application of Cassirer to digital culture. Digital symbols: emojis, memes, filters, avatars — are not primarily discursive or conceptual; they operate first and foremost aesthetically, generating immediate expressive atmospheres that shape perception before any propositional content is articulated.

Ernst Cassirer posits that myth is not a relic of primitive thought but a persistent symbolic form integral to human culture. It constructs reality through symbolic expression, objectifying emotions like fear and hope into shared “works” that solidify collective experience (Cassirer 1946, 45, 57). Unlike language’s logical structure, myth builds a unified worldview based on an intuitive “unity of feeling”, a principle it shares with art, and one which serves as a counterpoint to scientific law (Cassirer 1946, 48). This framework illuminates digital culture, where algorithmic narratives and viral memes function as modern rituals, condensing emotions into symbolic attractors that reorganize social reality (Cassirer 1946, 59, 228).

Crucially, as Anne Pollok further clarifies, the aesthetic dimension in Cassirer is not static beauty but a vital, formative energy (Pollok 2016, 85). In digital environments, this energetic principle manifests in the rapid morphogenesis of viral images and the atmospheric power of algorithmic curation, where form continuously generates new meaning rather than representing a pre-given reality (Pollok 2016, 92-94). By integrating myth with this dynamic aesthetics, Cassirer’s theory extends to the political: digital myths, like ancient ones, resist rational critique and can foster polarization (Cassirer 1946, 307). Recognising this aesthetic foundation of symbolic forms therefore allows us to advance a precise thesis: contemporary digital media do not simply transmit information but constitute emergent aesthetic-symbolic forms.

In his anthropological synthesis, Cassirer emphasizes that art, as a symbolic form, is not mere imitation but a discovery of reality through intensification rather than abstraction (Cassirer 1968, 125). Unlike science, which simplifies phenomena into concepts, art condenses sensory experiences into concrete, dynamic forms that reveal infinite possibilities (Cassirer 1968, 126). The aesthetic experience transforms passions into free, active states, purging their material burden through catharsis, as in Aristotle’s theory,

but reinterpreted as a dialogic process between artist and spectator (Cassirer 1968, 128-130). Emotions gain form, becoming transparent and liberated from immediacy, blending joy and sorrow in an organic unity (Cassirer 1968, 131).

This framework is vital for digital culture: emojis and memes, like lyrical poetry, are not passive reproductions but expressive forms that reorganize perception, echoing the “characteristic art” of Johann Goethe (1749-1832) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), where emotion turns formative (Cassirer, 1968, pp. 121-123). Cassirer's rejection of mimetic theories (by *ars simia naturae*) anticipates digital morphogenesis: viral content discovers new atmospheric realities, blending intimacy and immensity without deterministic reduction (Cassirer 1968, 119-120). Thus, aesthetics as symbolic pregnancy supports our thesis: digital media generate emergent forms that actively constitute social relationality, extending Cassirer's dialectic beyond traditional myth and art.

Cassirer argues that aesthetics is central to symbolic forms, mediating sensory impression into meaningful Gestalt through «symbolic pregnancy» (Cassirer 1957, 57). Art is not peripheral but the domain where symbolization's energetic character manifests, transforming raw perception into expressive unity (Cassirer 1957, 56). Myth and art share this origin in “primitive” expressive experiences, where form condenses emotions into objective structures (Cassirer 1957, 469). Unlike science's abstraction, aesthetics preserves life's vitality, bridging myth's emotional world with knowledge's phenomenology (Cassirer 1957, 57).

In applying this to digital culture, Cassirer's framework reveals emojis and algorithms as aesthetic-symbolic mediators: they generate immediate atmospheres, reorganizing perception via energetic forms (Cassirer 1957, 166). Mythical spatial intuition injects expressive features into digital spaces, where viral content incarnates collective essences (Cassirer 1957, 85). This supports our thesis: digital media initiate morphogenetic regimes, where aesthetic processes drive symbolic emergence, echoing myth's fusion of intuition and form (Cassirer 1957, 294). By grounding knowledge in symbolic diversity: language, myth, art—Cassirer predicts digital hyper-symbolization: interfaces, as “incarnations”, that blur subjective-objective boundaries, enhancing communicative dynamism (Cassirer 1957, 108).

They actively reorganise human perception and social relationality in ways that extend rather than merely illustrate

Cassirer's original framework, evolving mythically to drive atmospheric reorganization in communications.

4. Cultural and Social Significance of Symbolic Forms

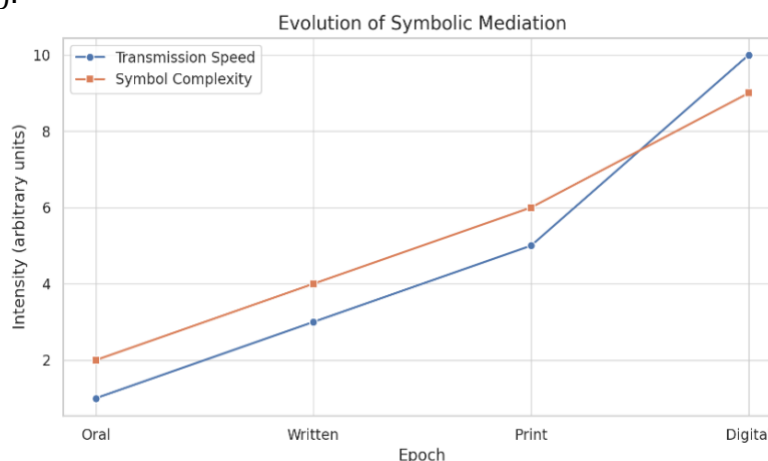
Ernst Cassirer's work has had a lasting impact on cultural theory, particularly in the field of social communications. Cassirer's emphasis on the symbolic nature of human interaction aligns closely with contemporary studies of media, language, and cultural identity. By framing culture as a web of symbolic systems, Cassirer provided a foundation for understanding how societies construct shared meanings and navigate social complexities. This perspective is especially relevant in analyzing modern phenomena such as digital communication, where new symbolic forms emojis, memes, and algorithms shape social interactions and collective identities (Lee & Baumeister 2007, 278-281).

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy also addresses fundamental social and philosophical problems, particularly the tension between individual freedom and cultural structures. Cassirer's argued that while symbolic forms provide the frameworks within which humans operate, they are not deterministic. Individuals and societies retain the capacity to reinterpret and reshape these forms, allowing for cultural innovation and transformation. This insight is critical for understanding social dynamics in pluralistic societies, where competing symbolic systems religious, political or ideological often clash, requiring negotiation and dialogue.

Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) phenomenology of perception provides a critical bridge to Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, particularly in understanding embodied experiences in digital spaces. Merleau-Ponty posits the body as the "threshold of the outside," where perception mediates between self and world: «The body is our general medium for having a world» (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 146). This aligns with Cassirer's concept of the "symbolic animal," where humans construct reality through symbolic forms like language and art. In digital culture, symbolic interactions, such as navigating virtual reality or engaging with avatars—become embodied experiences that create atmospheric worlds, blending intimacy (sensory engagement) with immensity (global connectivity).

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the lived body (*Leib*) complements Cassirer's view of symbolic mediation as a dynamic process. For instance, virtual environments shaped by algorithmic

symbolic forms immerse users in atmospheres that evoke bodily presence, akin to Merleau-Ponty's notion of perceptual intertwining: «We are in the world, and the world is in us» (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 206). While Cassirer systematizes symbolic forms across cultural domains, Merleau-Ponty grounds them in bodily perception, enriching the analysis of digital atmospheres. Social media platforms, for example, use symbolic forms (emojis, interfaces) to create fluid, interstitial spaces where users experience a dialectical interplay of presence and absence. By integrating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Cassirer's framework illuminates how digital symbolic forms mediate embodied atmospheres, addressing the journal's call to explore the dialectic of virtual spaces. This synthesis underscores the creative agency of users in co-creating atmospheric meanings, as Merleau-Ponty notes: «Perception is a creative act» (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 238).



Picture 2. Evolution of Symbolic Mediation.

The line chart traces the transformation of symbolic communication across four epochs: oral, written, print, and digital. It compares the speed of transmission (e.g., instant digital sharing vs. slow oral traditions) and the complexity of symbols (e.g., emojis as condensed meaning). This illustrates Cassirer's thesis that symbolic forms evolve technologically but retain their core function mediating human understanding. The digital age accelerates both metrics, reflecting hyper-symbolization in social media and AI.

Juhani Uolevi Pallasmaa's (b. 1936) work on architectural phenomenology enriches Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms by emphasizing the sensory and embodied nature of meaning-making. Pallasmaa (2009) argues that architecture engages an "atmospheric sense", where spaces evoke emotional

and bodily responses: «The atmospheric sense integrates all sensory experiences into a unified existential feeling (Pallasmaa 2009, 19). This perspective aligns with Cassirer's view of symbolic forms as dynamic mediators of human experience, particularly in digital contexts where virtual spaces mimic architectural environments. For example, social media interfaces, structured by symbolic forms like algorithms, create atmospheric experiences that engage users' sensory perception, blending intimacy (personal interaction) with immensity (global networks).

Pallasmaa's emphasis on the "thinking hand" as a mode of embodied wisdom (Pallasmaa 2009, 25) parallels Cassirer's concept of the "symbolic animal," where humans construct reality through creative acts. In digital culture, users' interactions with symbolic forms, such as designing avatars or navigating metaverses resemble Pallasmaa's notion of tactile engagement with space, producing atmospheres that are both personal and collective. Cassirer's framework, however, extends Pallasmaa's architectural focus by systematizing symbolic mediation across cultural domains (language, myth, art). While Pallasmaa grounds atmospheres in material and sensory contexts, Cassirer's symbolic forms apply to virtual spaces where algorithms shape atmospheric narratives. By synthesizing Pallasmaa's phenomenology with Cassirer's philosophy, we can analyze how digital platforms create interstitial atmospheres, where users experience a dialectical interplay of presence and absence, as Pallasmaa describes: «Architecture is an art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world» (Pallasmaa 2009, 31).

Moreover, Cassirer's work offers a nuanced approach to the philosophy of history. He viewed history not as a linear progression but as a process shaped by the interplay of symbolic forms. This perspective encourages cultural scholars to examine how historical narratives are constructed and contested, shedding light on the power dynamics inherent in social communication.

Cassirer's symbolic forms find their phenomenological parallel in the sensitive body, as articulated, for example, by Merleau-Ponty, Böhme and Zumthor. In digital spaces, symbolic interaction becomes a bodily-affective experience: users engage with avatars, interfaces, and algorithmic atmospheres that simultaneously feel intimate and immense. Yet phenomenology, powerful as it is in capturing the felt quality of these encounters, remains largely descriptive. It illuminates how digital symbols generate fluid,

interstitial atmospheres, but it does not yet explain the underlying dynamics of their emergence, rapid transformation, and occasional catastrophic collapse. To move from phenomenological description to a genuinely explanatory theory of how new symbolic forms are continuously born and reorganized in the digital age, Cassirer's framework must be supplemented with a morphodynamic perspective one that recent scholarship has finally provided.

5. The Morphogenesis of Digital Symbolic Forms: A Contemporary Extension of Cassirer

The most systematic and up-to-date continuation of Cassirer's grand project is undoubtedly German philosopher Wolfgang Wildgen's (1944-2024) *morphogenetische Neudeutung*¹ of the philosophy of symbolic forms. By grafting Ernst Cassirer's original insights onto René Thom's (1923-2002) catastrophe theory and Hermann Haken's (1927-2024) synergetics, Wildgen radically reconfigures the symbolic forms no longer as a stately, historical succession of *Weltanschauungen*², but as self-organising dynamical systems whose genesis, bifurcation, and sudden qualitative *Umbruch*³ follow strictly topological laws and attractor dynamics (Wildgen 2023, 1-12). In Wildgen's reading, the symbolic forms are no longer "forms" in the static sense, but genuine morphē — living, unstable *Gestalten* that continuously emerge ex nihilo through the interplay of forces and thresholds.

Cassirer argues that symbolic forms, including language, are not static but dynamic energies of the spirit, transforming life into cultural structures (Cassirer 2002, 49). Denying these forms would destroy the spiritual essence, as culture progresses through ideal worlds of signs, not passive contemplation (Cassirer 2002, 49). In language philosophy, aesthetics emerges as a general science of expression, per Vossler and Croce, but Cassirer warns against subsuming language under aesthetics alone; it must stand as an autonomous form alongside myth and art (Cassirer 2002, 102-

¹ The "morphogenetic reinterpretation" that grounds symbolic forms in the dynamic, pattern-generating processes of biological evolution and natural systems, thereby offering them a scientific foundation in the laws of form-creation rather than purely in transcendental consciousness.

² Worldviews — the coherent, epoch-defining worldviews like the "mythical" or "scientific" consciousness, but as self-organising dynamical systems.

³ *Umbruch* denotes a radical rupture in symbolic perception, a revolutionary break that establishes an entirely new paradigm for structuring reality (e.g., the transition from myth to language).

103). Language's "idealistic causality" derives from style over syntax, revealing creative acts of becoming (Cassirer 2002, 102). For digital applications, this morphodynamic view illuminates algorithms and memes as linguistic-symbolic evolutions: they are not mere imitations but formative processes, akin to style's primacy, generating new meanings in real-time catastrophes (Cassirer 2002, 103). Digital forms initiate regimes where aesthetic expression drives emergence, predicting hyper-symbolization in interfaces that blur intuition and discourse (Cassirer 2002, 103). This refines our thesis: contemporary media represent a new phase in symbolic morphogenesis, where language's energetic autonomy reorganizes collective perception, extending Cassirer's system beyond historical *Weltanschauungen*.

Esparza Urzúa examines Cassirer's philosophy of the body via "Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness», detailing aphasia and apraxia as impairments in symbolization (Esparza Urzúa 2024, 366). Patients lose linguistic and operational abilities, reducing cultural meaning creation (Esparza Urzúa 2024, 365). This reinforces humans, as "symbolic animals," emphasizing the body's role in symbolic formation and cultural development (Esparza Urzúa 2024, 367). For digital culture, it suggests bodily-affective experiences in avatars and interfaces are foundational to emergent symbolic forms, enhancing thesis on aesthetic reorganization.

Crucially, Wolfgang Wildgen explicitly brings this morphodynamic model into the digital present. Viral memes, algorithmic feeds, filter bubbles, avatar-economies, and the immersive architectures of the metaverse are no longer mere "illustrations" of Cassirer's typology; they constitute genuine morphogenetic events in which symbolic forms undergo rapid, often catastrophic transformations at a scale and velocity unknown to pre-digital culture (Wildgen 2023, 120-125). As Wildgen writes, the digital realm reveals the symbolic process in *statu nascendi*⁴: meaning does not sediment slowly over centuries, but condenses, mutates, and collapses within hours according to the logic of *Katastrophenattraktoren* and cusp bifurcations (Wildgen 2023, 181).

This insight yields the precise explanatory thesis that the present article defends: contemporary digital symbolic forms

⁴ For Cassirer, in "*statu nascendi*" is a methodological principle: to grasp the true essence and logic of a symbolic form (like myth or language), one must analyze it not as a finished product, but in its very process of emergence and formation.

above all memes, emojis, and algorithmic atmospheres — function as genuine “catastrophe attractors” that destabilise existing Sinn-Becken (basins of meaning) and abruptly reorganise collective perception, affect, and social relationality. Whereas the classical myth needed generations to achieve relative *Stabilität* (stability), the digital mythos arises, proliferates, and perishes in a breathless rhythm of emergence and *Verlöschen*. Here the ancient dialectic of *Gebärden* and *Sinnbildung* (gesture and symbolic pregnance) is accelerated to the point of hyper-morphogenesis: aesthetic-energetic processes (Pollok 2016; Matherne 2021) no longer unfold in the slow temporality of cultural history, but in the explosive *Jetztzeit*⁵ of algorithmic curation and viral contagion.

By integrating the aesthetic-energetic core of Cassirer’s system (the *lebendige Form* as vital energy) with Wildgen’s morphodynamic paradigm, the philosophy of symbolic forms finally becomes genuinely predictive rather than merely retrospective. The digital age does not simply accelerate the old forms; it inaugurates a new morphogenetisches Regime in which aesthetic-atmospheric forces continuously generate, stabilise and with equal suddenness — annihilate collective worlds. In Wildgen’s terms, we are witnessing nothing less than a new phase in the *Schöpfung der Formen*, a phase in which the human being, still animal symbolicum, now creates and destroys its symbolic universes in real time, *sub specie algorithmica et catastrophe*.

6. Contemporary Relevance of Cassirer’s Philosophy

In today’s world, marked by rapid technological advancements and global interconnectedness, Cassirer’s ideas remain strikingly relevant. His concept of symbolic forms provides a robust framework for analyzing the complexities of modern social communication. For instance, the rise of digital platforms has transformed the ways in which symbolic forms are created and disseminated, raising philosophical questions about authenticity,

⁵ For Cassirer, *Jetztzeit* (if extrapolated) is not a historical “present moment,” but the atemporal, actual moment of the symbolic act of form-creation, in which spirit spontaneously constitutes and apprehends reality. For Cassirer, past (*die vergangene Welt*) and future (*die zukünftige Welt*) are not objective, chronological containers but are themselves constituted by symbolic forms (myth, language, history). They are modalities of meaning, not stages in a timeline. Past and future are not “given” but are continually formed and reformed by the symbolic acts of consciousness in its eternal, constitutive *Jetztzeit*.

meaning, and cultural authority. Cassirer's emphasis on the active role of humans in shaping symbolic systems offers a valuable perspective for addressing these challenges, encouraging critical reflection on how digital cultures influence social cohesion and individual agency (Truwant 2021, 170-190).

Furthermore, Cassirer's philosophy speaks to ongoing debates in cultural studies about the nature of meaning in a globalized world. As societies grapple with issues of cultural diversity and ideological polarization, his work underscores the importance of understanding symbolic forms as both unifying and differentiating forces. By studying the interplay of language, art, and media, scholars can better navigate the philosophical and social challenges of fostering mutual understanding in diverse societies (tabl. 1).

Digital platforms, such as social media and metaverses, exemplify Cassirer's claim that symbolic forms actively shape reality. For example, emojis serve as condensed symbolic forms, conveying emotions that resonate on a personal level while circulating globally, thus embodying a dialectical interplay between the intimate and the immense. Following Böhme's view of atmospheres as radiating presences, digital interfaces can be seen as liminal spaces where users' bodily engagement (*Leib*) with symbols: avatars, interfaces or algorithms: produces fluid, evanescent atmospheres that transcend material boundaries.

Cassirer's symbolic forms can be conceptualized as architectonic structures, akin to the atmospheric spaces described by Peter Zumthor (b. 1943) and Steven Joseph Holl (b. 1947). Just as architectural environments create atmospheres through light, shadow, and materiality, symbolic forms, such as algorithms or digital narratives — construct virtual spaces of meaning.

Peter Zumthor's architectural philosophy, centered on the creation of atmospheres, offers a productive dialogue with Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms in analyzing digital culture. Zumthor describes atmospheres as "architectural environments" shaped by sensory elements like light, sound, and materiality: «Atmospheres are about how a space feels, how it surrounds you» (Zumthor 2006, 13). This sensory focus resonates with Cassirer's view of symbolic forms as active processes that structure human experience. In digital spaces, symbolic forms such as algorithms or digital narratives function as architectonic structures, akin to Zumthor's buildings, creating virtual atmospheres that blend intimacy and immensity. For instance, the curated feeds of social media

platforms evoke a sense of personal connection while connecting users to global networks, mirroring Zumthor's dialectic of inside/outside.

Cassirer's philosophy extends Zumthor's material-based approach by framing symbolic forms as cultural systems that mediate meaning beyond physical spaces. While Zumthor's *Thermal Baths of Vals* (1996) uses stone and water to create atmospheric resonance, digital platforms rely on symbolic forms like emojis to evoke emotional presence in virtual environments. Zumthor's insight that "architecture is about presence" (Zumthor 2006, 21) aligns with Cassirer's notion of symbolic mediation, where digital symbols generate atmospheres that users inhabit. By integrating Zumthor's atmospheric theory, Cassirer's framework gains a tangible dimension, illuminating how virtual spaces, like architectural ones, foster a dialectical interplay of sensory engagement and collective meaning. This synthesis reveals how digital symbolic forms construct fluid, liminal atmospheres, addressing Zumthor's call to create spaces that "speak to the senses and the soul" (Zumthor 2006, 29).

Steven Joseph Holl (b. 1947), a prominent American architect, enriches Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms through his phenomenological approach to architecture, which emphasizes the creation of atmospheric spaces. Holl describes architecture as a dynamic interplay of light, shadow, and bodily experience, noting, «Architecture is born of the parallax of moving through space» (Holl 2000, 27). This perspective aligns with Cassirer's view of symbolic forms: language, myth, art, as active processes that structure human experience. In Holl's *Chapel of St. Ignatius* (1997), the interplay of light and form creates atmospheres that evoke both intimacy (personal sensory engagement) and immensity (spiritual resonance), mirroring Cassirer's notion of symbols as mediators of meaning.

In digital culture, Holl's architectural principles find parallels in virtual spaces shaped by symbolic forms like algorithms and interfaces. Social media platforms, for instance, function as architectonic structures, curating atmospheric experiences that oscillate between personal interaction and global connectivity. Holl's emphasis on the "phenomenology of perception" in architecture (Holl 2000, 32) complements Cassirer's framework by grounding symbolic mediation in sensory experience. While Cassirer systematizes cultural forms, Holl's designs, such as the

Kiasma Museum, create fluid, liminal atmospheres that resonate with the *Lebenswelt* call for exploring interstitial spaces. By integrating Holl's approach, Cassirer's philosophy illuminates how digital symbolic forms emojis, avatars construct virtual atmospheres that blend the intimate and the immense, as Holl notes: "Architecture speaks to the senses through movement and light" (Holl 2000, 29). This synthesis highlights the architectonic potential of symbols in shaping contemporary communicative spaces.

Gernot Böhme's phenomenology of atmospheres provides a vital lens for interpreting Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms in the context of digital culture. Böhme defines atmospheres as «neither wholly internal nor external» but as radiating presences that mediate between subjects and environments (Böhme 2013, 23). This dialectical framework resonates with Cassirer's view of symbolic forms: language, myth, art, as active processes that structure reality rather than merely reflect it. In digital spaces, symbolic forms such as emojis or algorithms create atmospheres that shape user experiences, oscillating between intimacy (personal engagement) and immensity (global connectivity). For instance, a viral meme, functioning as a modern myth, generates an atmospheric mood that permeates social media, evoking collective emotions while remaining fluid and unquantifiable, as Böhme (2017) suggests: «Atmospheres are experienced as quasi-objective feelings in space» (Böhme 2017, 45).

Cassirer's non-reductionist approach complements Böhme's phenomenology by emphasizing the systematic role of symbols in meaning-making. While Böhme focuses on the sensory and emotional resonance of atmospheres, Cassirer highlights how symbolic forms organize cultural experience. In virtual environments, algorithms curate content to produce atmospheric effects curated feeds on platforms like Instagram create a sense of presence that is both intimate and expansive. Böhme's insight into the "in-between" nature of atmospheres (Böhme2013, 30) aligns with Cassirer's notion of symbolic mediation, where digital symbols bridge individual perception and collective narratives. By integrating Böhme's atmospheric theory, Cassirer's framework gains a sensory dimension, illuminating how digital symbolic forms generate fluid, liminal spaces of meaning in the 21st century.

7. Followers of Ernst Cassirer

Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) an art historian who worked with Cassirer at Hamburg, Panofsky adopted the concept of symbolic forms in his iconological method, notably in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, which analyzes visual culture as a symbolic system (Panofsky 1927, 40).

Susanne Langer (1895-1985) spent time in Britain and was heavily influenced by Cassirer. Her *Philosophy in a New Key* applies symbolic forms to aesthetics, viewing art as a symbolic expression of human experience (Langer 1942, 91-93).

Table 1. Cassirer's Key Theories: Symbolic Forms and Their Modern Relevance

Key Concept	Definition	Examples in Digital Age	Theoretical Significance
Symbolic Animal	Humans are defined by their ability to create and use symbols (not just reason).	Social media profiles, AI-generated art, avatars	Challenges reductionist views of human nature; emphasizes creativity in meaning-making.
Symbolic Forms	Cultural systems (language, myth, art, science) that structure reality.	Emojis (language), memes (myth), algorithms (science)	Provides a framework to analyze culture as dynamic, pluralistic, and non-hierarchical.
Dynamic Mediation	Symbols actively shape reality rather than passively reflect it.	Viral trends reshaping norms, AI curating information	Opposes deterministic/materialist models; highlights human agency in technological contexts.
Cultural Pluralism	Different symbolic forms coexist, each with its own logic and validity.	Conflicting narratives in polarized online spaces	Offers tools to study ideological clashes without relativism or absolutism.
Interdisciplinary Synthesis	Bridges philosophy, anthropology, media studies.	Digital humanities, media ecology research	Prefigures 21st-century interdisciplinary approaches to culture and technology.

Heinz Cassirer (1903-1979), Ernst Cassirer's son, a Kantian scholar, extended his father's work through studies of Kant's philosophy, applying symbolic forms to cultural theory and philosophical interpretation (Cassirer 1954, 73-76).

Joachim Ritter (1903-1974) studied under Cassirer at the University of Hamburg, completing his doctoral thesis under his supervision. Ritter's work on Aristotle and Hegel reflects Cassirer's emphasis on the historical interplay of symbolic forms, particularly in his concept of "second nature, «which explores cultural structures as human creations» (Ritter 19633, 45).

Raymond Klibansky (1905-2005) , a historian of ideas, corresponded with Cassirer and drew on his symbolic forms in his studies of Renaissance philosophy, notably in *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition*. His work reflects Cassirer's approach to tracing symbolic structures across history (Klibansky 1939, 32).

Nelson Goodman's (1906-1998) *Ways of Worldmaking* draws on Cassirer's ideas, exploring how symbolic systems construct reality in art, science, and philosophy (Goodman 1978, 101-102).

Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995) present at the 1929 Davos debate, was influenced by Cassirer's ideas on language and intersubjectivity. His early work on phenomenology incorporates Cassirer's view of symbolic forms as mediators of human experience (Lévinas 1961, 65-67).

Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1908-2009) F structuralist analysis of myth in *The Savage Mind* was influenced by Cassirer's *Language and Myth*, viewing myths as symbolic forms that organize cultural meaning (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 87-89).

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) engaged with Cassirer's work, though critically, in his studies of the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. His analysis of cultural and philosophical tensions reflects Cassirer's influence on symbolic forms as mediators of cultural meaning (Berlin 1979, 54).

Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) Blumenberg critically engaged with Cassirer's ideas in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, focusing on myth and metaphor as symbolic forms that shape cultural narratives. Blumenberg extended Cassirer's framework by emphasizing historical discontinuities in cultural meaning-making (Blumenberg 1966, 112).

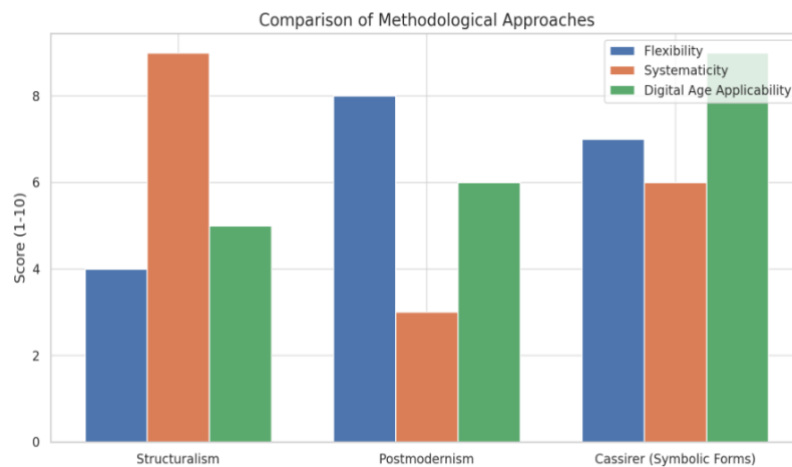
Arthur Pap (1921-1959), a student of Cassirer at Yale, Pap applied the concept of the "relative a priori" to scientific theories, emphasizing symbolic structures in knowledge formation (Pap 1946, 55-59).

John Michael Krois (1943-2010) edited Cassirer's posthumous works and applied his concept of symbolic forms to visual culture and embodiment, particularly in art and media studies, expanding Cassirer's framework to modern cultural phenomena (Krois 1998, 87).

Donald Phillip Verene (b. 1937) an editor of Cassirer's papers at Yale, has advanced Cassirer's philosophy in cultural theory and philosophical anthropology, focusing on symbolic forms in cultural contexts (Krois 1998, 31-34).

Ingmar Meland (b. 1966) a contemporary scholar, organized the 2023 Paris Conference on Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. The 2023 Paris Conference on Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms was organized to mark the centenary of Cassirer's magnum opus, celebrating its enduring impact on modern thought. This gathering brought together international scholars to reevaluate the work's legacy in contemporary philosophy and cultural studies. Meland's work on semiotics and intercultural communication builds on Cassirer's symbolic forms to address modern cultural dynamics (Meland 2024, 17-20).

Edward Skidelsky (b. 1973) expands on Cassirer's framework by proposing that modernity functions as a singular 'symbolic cipher', a coded reality we continually decode in everyday practice. He conceptualizes modern and post-modern society as an interconnected tapestry of symbolic forms, where cultural meaning emerges through perpetual interpretation. This perspective positions contemporary life as a dynamic, hermeneutic process wherein collective and individual actors negotiate shared symbolic structures (Skidelsky 2008, 120-128).



Picture 3. Methodological Comparison: Structuralism vs. Postmodernism vs. Cassirer.

A bar chart evaluates three theoretical approaches structuralism, postmodernism and Cassirer's symbolic forms across criteria like flexibility, systematicity, and applicability to the digital age. Cassirer's framework strikes a balance: more adaptable than rigid structuralism but more systematic than postmodern relativism. His emphasis on dynamic, interdisciplinary symbolism (e.g., analyzing memes as mythic narratives) proves uniquely suited to studying digital culture's hybridity.

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms represents a monumental contribution to cultural theory, offering a sophisticated framework for understanding the complexities of human culture and social communication. His insights into the symbolic nature of human experience provide a powerful tool for analyzing the interplay of language, art, history, and other cultural forms. In an era defined by rapid technological and social change, Cassirer's ideas remain profoundly relevant, offering guidance for navigating the philosophical and social challenges of contemporary life. His work continues to inspire cultural scholars to explore the dynamic, creative processes through which humans construct meaning, making it an enduring resource for the study of social communications.

8. The Enduring Relevance of Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy

Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms remains a vital intellectual framework for understanding the complexities of modern culture, communication, and social organization. In an era marked by rapid technological transformation, ideological fragmentation, and the globalization of symbolic exchange, Cassirer's insights into the constitutive role of symbols in human experience offer a robust analytical tool one that transcends the limitations of both rigid structuralism and postmodern relativism.

While Böhme's phenomenology of atmospheres emphasizes the unquantifiable, emotional resonance of spaces, Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms offers a complementary perspective by highlighting the systematic nature of meaning-making. Both frameworks converge in their recognition of a dialectical process: atmospheres, like symbolic forms, are neither fully subjective nor objective but exist in the interplay between the two. In digital culture, this dialectic manifests in phenomena such as viral trends, which function as atmospheric narratives: structured by symbolic forms (e.g., memes as modern myths) yet experienced as fluid, collective moods. Cassirer's non-reductionist approach thus enriches the study of atmospheres by grounding their fluidity in the creative agency of symbolic mediation.

The digital age, with its proliferation of new symbolic forms — from algorithmic governance to viral memes demands precisely the kind of nuanced analysis Cassirer pioneered. Where deterministic theories reduce culture to economic or technological imperatives, and where postmodern approaches dissolve it into a cacophony of

subjective interpretations, Cassirer's framework strikes a dialectical balance. It acknowledges the material and historical constraints shaping symbolic systems while affirming humanity's capacity to reinterpret and transform them. This duality is particularly salient in addressing contemporary challenges: the crisis of shared narratives, the commodification of culture, and the rise of artificial intelligence as a mediator of human interaction. Cassirer's concept of the "symbolic animal" reminds us that technology does not dictate culture; rather, culture appropriates and reconfigures technology through symbolic practice.

Moreover, Cassirer's interdisciplinary approach: bridging philosophy, anthropology and the study of media anticipates the methodological pluralism required to analyze today's hyperconnected world. His influence on scholars across disciplines, from media studies (Krois) to political theory (Skidelsky), demonstrates the adaptability of his ideas. The 2023 Paris Conference's centennial reexamination of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* underscores this point: Cassirer's work is not a relic but a resource, continually reinterpreted to address new contexts (pic. 3).

Yet Cassirer's relevance extends beyond academia. In a world grappling with cultural polarization, his philosophy offers a path toward critical engagement without dogmatism. By framing cultural conflict as a clash of symbolic systems each with its own logic but open to dialogue his work provides tools to navigate ideological divides. Similarly, his non-reductionist view of history counters both neoliberal triumphalism and nihilistic despair, revealing how societies reconstruct meaning through crisis and continuity.

To dismiss Cassirer as a figure of the past would be to ignore the very essence of his thought: that symbolic forms evolve but endure, adapting to new conditions while retaining their foundational role in human life. His philosophy, like the symbols it examines, is not static but generative, a living tradition that continues to shape debates in cultural theory, digital humanities, and beyond. As we confront the ambiguities of a post-digital, post-globalized future, Cassirer's insistence on the creative power of symbolic mediation remains not just pertinent but indispensable. The task for contemporary scholarship is not to memorialize him but to extend his project: to decode the symbolic cipher of our time with the same rigor and imagination he brought to his own.

Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms operate as dialectical mediators, bridging intimate perception with the vast expanse of global networks within digital spaces.

In this light, Cassirer's legacy is not merely academic but emancipatory. By equipping us to critically analyze the symbols that structure our world, his work empowers us to participate in their transformation, a task as urgent now as it was a century ago.

9. Cassirer's Theory of Myth in Historical Context

Ivan Strenski, in his seminal work, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski* (1987), situates Ernst Cassirer's theory of myth within the broader intellectual and historical landscape of twentieth-century thought, comparing it with Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) and Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942). Strenski emphasizes that Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms is not an ahistorical abstraction but a response to the cultural crises of his time, particularly the rise of fascism in Weimar Germany (Strenski 1987, 1–86). Cassirer viewed myth, as one of the fundamental symbolic forms: alongside language, art, religion and science—through which humans construct reality. Myth, for Cassirer, is a primitive yet enduring mode of thought that organizes emotional and perceptual chaos into coherent worldviews, distinct from rational science but equally valid in its expressive function (Strenski 1987, 15). Strenski highlights how Cassirer integrated aesthetics into this framework: myth shares art's “symbolic pregnance,” where forms condense sensory experiences into meaningful *Gestalten*, blending intuition and emotion to create cultural unity (Strenski 1987, 28).

Strenski critiques Cassirer for his idealist bias, arguing that his theory downplays myth's social and political dangers, as seen in *The Myth of the State* (1946), where Cassirer warns of myth's manipulation in totalitarian regimes (Strenski 1987, 45). Historically, Strenski connects Cassirer's Jewish background and exile from Nazi Germany to his emphasis on myth as a double-edged sword—creative in culture but regressive when politicized. This contextualization reveals Cassirer's theory as a humanistic defense against irrationalism, influenced by Kantian roots and neo-Kantian debates (Strenski 1987, 62).

For modern digital culture, Strenski's analysis illuminates myth's relevance: digital symbols like memes and algorithms

function as contemporary myths, rapidly organizing collective emotions and narratives in fragmented publics (Strenski 1987, 78). Unlike Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Cassirer's dynamic view allows for symbolic evolution, where aesthetic-atmospheric processes drive meaning-making in social communications. Strenski's historicist approach underscores that Cassirer's framework, though idealistic, offers tools to critique digital myth-making, such as viral propaganda, as extensions of symbolic forms that both empower and endanger cultural agency. This enriches our thesis: digital media represent a new morphogenetic phase, where myth's aesthetic core reorganizes perception, echoing Cassirer's dialectic of progress and peril.

10. Conclusion

Ernst Cassirer's definition of the human being, as animal symbolicum remains not only intact but incandescently alive in the digital age. We do not merely inhabit reality; we ceaselessly weave it through formes symboliques that pulse across screens, algorithms, and virtual atmospheres. Language, myth, art and science are no longer separate kingdoms but interdependent forces in a living system (*sistema dinamico*, as Cassirer himself might have said had he witnessed today's hyper-connected world). From the emoji that condenses an entire mood to the algorithmic mythologies that govern attention and desire, contemporary technologies reveal with startling clarity that symbols do not simply reflect existence; they actively constitute it («sie formen die Welt», as Cassirer wrote, and now the world is ceaselessly reformed in real time).

In this context, Meyer et al. (2024) revisit Cassirer's symbolic foundation of culture, contrasting with evolutionary views by emphasizing symbols as cultural constructs (Meyer et al. 2024, 3825). Symbols shape institutions through meaning-making, resonating with institutional theory (Meyer et al. 2024, 3826). Cassirer's approach offers a humanistic defense against irrationalism, integrating aesthetics into societal structures (Meyer et al. 2024, 3827). In digital contexts, algorithms and platforms form symbolic institutions, where atmospheric processes reorganize social relationality, supporting our morphogenetic thesis.

Crucially, the integration of recent Cassirer scholarship particularly the rediscovery of the aesthetic core (Pollok 2016;

Matherne 2021) and the morphogenetic turn (Wildgen 2023) – permits us to formulate a precise contemporary result: digital culture is not governed by technological determinism nor dissolved into postmodern fragmentation, but constitutes a new phase in the morphogenesis of symbolic forms in which aesthetic-atmospheric processes continuously generate, destabilise, and reorganise collective meaning.

This leads to the conclusion that this Cassirerian lens offers a *terza via*⁶—neither the economic determinism of vulgar materialism nor the ironic fragmentation of postmodern anything goes, but a philosophy of culture capable of holding together *intimità* and *immensità* without dissolving one into the other. In the fluid atmospheres of social media and the metaverse, symbolic forms become atmospheric mediators: they create liminal spaces where the most private emotion can suddenly flood into planetary visibility, and where the immensity of data clouds can fold back into the intimacy of a single touch on a screen.

Finally, extending this logic to the economic sphere, Blind and Steineck argue Cassirer's "Philosophy of Symbolic Forms" misses the economy as a symbolic form, proposing it as path-dependently configured normative domain (Blind & Steineck 2020, 316). Through medieval Europe-Japan comparison, they highlight variability in economic cognition (Blind & Steineck 2020, 317). Economic thought superposes supply/demand with cognitive patterns (Blind & Steineck 2020, 318). For digital age, platforms as economic symbols drive morphogenesis, where aesthetic processes shape value and exchange, extending our thesis to communicative economies.

Here, competing symbolic forms: political myths, religious narratives, techno-utopian dreams do not merely clash; they enter

⁶ Cassirer's *terza via* is his symbolic turn: a third philosophical path beyond the deadlock of empiricism (which reduces mind to a passive mirror of nature) and dogmatic idealism (which constructs reality from pure reason). His solution posits the symbolic function as the mediating activity through which consciousness accesses and constitutes a meaningful world. Reality is always already apprehended within a symbolic form, which is neither a copy nor a pure invention, but an active organ of understanding. Knowledge (*Via Apriorica* – dogmatic idealism) is the unfolding of internal, immutable categories of reason imposed upon amorphous matter. Reality is constructed by the subject from within itself.

into that *Auseinandersetzung*⁷ that Cassirer always defended: a dialogical tension that refuses both dogmatic closure and relativist indifference. To read our digital present through Cassirer is to discover a surprising actuality: his thought, far from being a relic of Weimar humanism, emerges as one of the most powerful instruments we have to think the strange intimacy of our global village and the vertiginous immensity of the networks that sustain it. In the end, *l'uomo simbolico* has not disappeared; he has simply migrated into the luminous, restless space between pixels and flesh, still weaving today more than ever the fragile, magnificent tapestry of meaning.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express profound gratitude to my mother, Tatiana Kuznetsova, who first introduced me to the aesthetic theories. I am also deeply indebted to my teachers: Prof. Dr. hab. Yakiv V. Tararuev, Ilia V. Ilyin, PhD in Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor and Yuliia S. Taglina, PhD in Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor.

References

Andersch N. – Cutting J., 2014: *Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms and its impact on the theory of psychopathology*, «History of Psychiatry», 25, 2, pp. 203-223. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X14525074>.

Berlin I., 1979: *Against the current: Essays in the history of ideas*, London, Hogarth Press.

Blind G. D. – Steineck R., 2020: *The missing piece in E. Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms: «The economy, Evolutionary and*

⁷ *Auseinandersetzung* — the constitutive, dialectical clash between different symbolic forms (myth, language, science) or philosophical systems. It is not a fight for annihilation, but a productive confrontation through which each form defines its own essence, limits, and internal logic by engaging with its "other." This process is the primary driver of cultural and intellectual development in his philosophy, explaining how new forms emerge from the crisis (*Umbruch*) of old ones.

Institutional Economics Review», 17, 2, pp. 315-339. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40844-020-00191-0>.

Blumenberg H., 1966: *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985 (English edition: The legitimacy of the modern age, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).

Böhme G., 1995: *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013.

Böhme G., 2017: *The aesthetics of atmospheres*, London – New York, Routledge.

Cassirer E., 1923-1929: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 3 Bde., Berlin, Bruno Cassirer (English edition: The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, 3 vols., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1953-1957). <https://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Ernst-Cassirer-The-Philosophy-of-Symbolic-Forms3c.pdf>.

Cassirer E., 1923: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil: Die Sprache*, Berlin, Bruno Cassirer (Russian edition: *Filosofiya simvolicheskikh form. Tom 1: Yazyk*, trans. S. Romashko, Moskva – Sankt-Peterburg, Universitetskaya Kniga, 2002). <http://yanko.lib.ru/books/philosoph/kassirer-phil-simv-form-1-8l.pdf>.

Cassirer E., 1944: *An essay on man: An introduction to a philosophy of human culture*, New Haven, Yale University Press (Spanish edition: *Antropología filosófica: Introducción a una filosofía de la cultura*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968). <https://archive.org/details/cassirer-ernst.-antropologia-filosofica-1968>.

Cassirer E., 1946: *The Myth of the State*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press. <https://ia902908.us.archive.org/18/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.506295/2015.506295.myth-of.pdf>.

Cassirer H., 1954: *Kant's First Critique: An appraisal of the permanent significance of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, London, Allen & Unwin (reprint: New York, Humanities Press, 1978).

Esparza Urzúa G. A., 2024: *Body, illness and symbol in Ernst Cassirer*, «Filozofia», 79, 4, pp. 365-379. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/filozofia.2024.79.4.2>.

Filieri L., 2024: *Directions of objectivity: Cassirer on art as a symbolic language*, «Continental Philosophy Review», 57, pp. 165-184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-024-09651-5>.

Goodman N., 1978: *Ways of worldmaking*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company.

Holl S., 2000: *Parallax*, Princeton Architectural Press.

Klibansky R., 1939: *The continuity of the Platonic tradition during the Middle Ages*, London, Warburg Institute, 1982.

Krois J. M., 1998: *Cassirer's unpublished critique of Heidegger*, E. Cassirer, *The philosophy of symbolic forms*, vol. 4, New Haven, Yale University Press, pp. 1-24.

Langer S. K., 1942: *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite, and art*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996.

Lee S. – Baumeister R. (eds.), 2007: *The domestic and the foreign in architecture*, Rotterdam, 010 Publishers.

Lévinas E., 1961: *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, La Haye, Martinus Nijhoff.

Lévi-Strauss C., 1962: *La pensée sauvage*, Paris, Plon (English edition: *The savage mind*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

Matherne S., 2021: *Cassirer*, London-New York, Routledge.

Meland I. – Aarnes J.R. – Lassègue J., 2024: *A hundred years of symbolic forms – From Cassirer to contemporary research: Introduction*, «Cahiers de sémiotique des cultures», 2, pp. 17-32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34847/nkl.8d88n2v>.

Merleau-Ponty M., 1945: *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard.

Meyer R. E. – Leixnering S. – Kornberger M. – Jancsary D. – Höllerer M. A., 2024: *Ernst Cassirer and the symbolic foundation of institutions*, «Journal of Management Studies», 61, 8, pp. 3824-3842. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13038>.

Pallasmaa J., 2009: *The thinking hand: Existential and embodied wisdom in architecture*, Chichester, Wiley.

Panofsky E., 1927: *Perspective as symbolic form*, New York, Zone Books, 1991.

Pap A., 1946: *The a priori in physical theory*, New York, King's Crown Press, 1947.

Pollok A., 2016: *Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms and the aesthetic ideal of form*, «Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal», 37, 1, pp. 71-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5840/gfj20163714>.

Ritter J., 1963: *Metaphysik und Politik: Studien zu Aristoteles und Hegel*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003.

Skidelsky E., 2008: *Ernst Cassirer: The last philosopher of culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

Strenski I., 1987: *Four theories of myth in twentieth-century history: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press.

Truwant S. (ed.), 2021: *Interpreting Cassirer: Critical essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wildgen W., 2023: *Morphogenesis of symbolic forms: Meaning in music, art, religion, and language*, Cham, Springer Nature.

Zumthor P., 2006: *Atmospheres: Architectural environments, surrounding objects*, Basel, Birkhäuser Architektur.