

International Conference  
University of Cologne

## Husserl and Cassirer. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Culture

a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne, 3. Etage, Skyfall  
10-11 October 2019, Cologne (DE)

Organizers: Prof. Thiemo Breyer, Marco Cavallaro, Elio Antonucci

### TOPIC:

Edmund Husserl and Ernst Cassirer belong to two seemingly incompatible strains of philosophy. The former is the founder of phenomenology, the latter one of the most prominent scholars of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism. What principally distinguishes these philosophical traditions from one another are their respective methods. The methodological tenet of Husserl's phenomenology lies in the principle according to which an immediate, intuitive experience of any kind of phenomena is and must be possible, in order to find an answer to the problem of knowledge foundation. Elaborating on a (Neo-)Kantian motif, Cassirer instead presumes the fundamentally mediated character of human cognition, distinguishing the different, incommensurable ways that meaning is given to experience, which he calls "symbolic forms".

In spite of these differences, one can notice in both authors an interesting convergence towards similar problems related to the philosophy of culture. Four common research questions lie at the heart of Husserl's and Cassirer's philosophical approaches to culture. First, both investigate the general problem of the 'making' of cultural sense. Husserl speaks of "constitution of spiritual (*geistige*) predicates," whereby Cassirer focuses on the notion of "symbolic function," considering different possibilities of categorial construction within culture. Second, there is the problem of the interplay between perception and cognition as conditions for our access to cultural objects and world: How is an object with its cultural properties given in experience? Is there a primacy of the cultural attitude of the natural man in contrast to the theoretical attitude of the philosopher and scientist? Third, since culture is nothing without a plurality of subjects who give sense to the world, both authors thematize the encounter of the other both as a transcendental condition of cultural experience as well as a part of that experience. The question is then to specify the structure of intersubjective experience, less in terms of immediate givenness (empathy) and more as result of a complex cognitive operation, called understanding (*Verstehen*). For, culturally experiencing the other does not only mean perceiving the other's body as distinct from a material thing but also understanding its motivated behavior in and towards the world, which is in the first place a cultural world both in its familiarity and strangeness (cf. the opposition of *Heimwelt* and *Fremdwelt*). Fourth, Husserl and Cassirer more or less implicitly raise the question concerning the nature of the cultural subject, being at the same time the one who constitutes cultural sense as well as the one who experiences itself and the others against the background of a pre-given, pre-constituted cultural world.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the relationship between the philosophies of Husserl and Cassirer (see for instance Bösch 2002, Kyeong-Seop Choi 2007, Bernet 2010, Holzhey 2010, Möckel 2010, Martell 2015, Neuber 2016). Surely, this is partly due to a renewed attention for the previously almost forgotten tradition of Neo-Kantianism, to which Cassirer belongs (cf. Luft and Makkreel 2009, de Warren and Staiti 2015). Despite some important exceptions (Luft 2004, 2011), however, a thematization of the relationship between Husserl's and Cassirer's approaches towards a philosophy of culture has so far been neglected. The aim of this conference is to fill this gap in the literature and thus to systematically investigate some central issues around the project of a philosophy of culture from the perspectives of Husserl and Cassirer. These issues include but are not limited to:

- the constitution of cultural sense
- the experience of cultural object
- the phenomenon of expression (*Ausdruck*)
- understanding (*Verstehen*) of the other in the cultural world
- the nature of cultural subject(s)

CONFIRMED KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- Guido Kreis (Aarhus University)
- Dieter Lohmar (Universität zu Köln)
- Sebastian Luft (Marquette University)
- Christian Möckel (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
- Martina Plümacher (TU Berlin)
- Andrea Staiti (University of Parma)
- Frederik Stjernfelt (Aalborg University Copenhagen)
- Panos Theodorou (University of Crete)

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS:

We invite submissions of abstracts for a 20-minute presentation followed by a discussion. Papers may be submitted on any topic dealing with the abovementioned issues. Although one-side contributions to one or the other philosopher are also welcomed and accepted, priority will be given to papers which address points of continuity and/or discontinuity between Husserl's and Cassirer's philosophies of culture.

Please send an abstract in English or German (max 500 words), prepared for blind-review to [marco.cavallaro@uni-koeln.de](mailto:marco.cavallaro@uni-koeln.de) or [eantonuc@smail.uni-koeln.de](mailto:eantonuc@smail.uni-koeln.de) by the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2019. The name of author as well as affiliation should be included in the email. Notification of acceptance will be given by the middle of May.

WEBSITE:

<http://artes.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de>

Please do not hesitate to contact the organizers ([marco.cavallaro@uni-koeln.de](mailto:marco.cavallaro@uni-koeln.de) or [elio.antonucci@uni-koeln.de](mailto:elio.antonucci@uni-koeln.de)) if you have any questions concerning the conference.