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Globalization as a Symbolic Form: Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Form* as the Basis for a Theory of Globalization

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate and problematize the present status of theories of globalization. Because of the actual diversity of these theories, a philosophical definition must be able to include this diversity without becoming meaningless. This paper claims that Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture—especially his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929)—is particularly suitable for providing a uniform access. The first part therefore examines an understanding of such symbolic forms; it shows on the one hand the problems of classical theories, and on the other hand the advantage of a functional access of cultural production, provided through the concept of Cassirer's elaboration of the conditions of possibility of culture and meaning. The paper then identifies the different aspects of globalization as a symbolic form, including the way it became a picture of the world, changed the understandings of space and time, is an interpretive paradigm and myth, and finally has consequences for the construction of subjectivity and identity. In a summarizing section, the paper highlights the paradoxical structure of globalization as its constituent moment. With the concept of symbolic forms, this awareness of contingency can be understood as a specific way of comprehending, related to our time and its cultural processing and managing strategies. In conclusion, there is much to suggest that the concept of globalization should be treated as a world image. Only then can one understand why globalization has become a symbol of our time: on the one hand, it occupies itself with universalistic claims; on the other, it is permeated by particular anxieties.

It has become difficult to escape the concept of globalization. Not only does it consistently shape the media and academic discourse—our lives are also directly affected by the consequences of globalization. However, more detailed inquiries reveal that the phenomena to which globalization relates vary widely. This is true for everyday use, as well as for scientific use: a uniform definition of globalization does not exist. Therefore, the aim cannot be to search for a unique definition or something that all things meant by globalization have in common. Equally,

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the use of this term in philosophical approaches is not self-evident. Instead, the question arises: what are the conditions of the possibility of a common meaning of globalization?

An author whose life's work and philosophy are in exactly that relationship of epistemology, conceptual theory and cultural philosophy is Ernst Cassirer. He was the first Jewish director of a German university, and he subsequently escaped from National Socialism, went into exile and died in New York; he fell into academic oblivion for a long time, until his theoretical approach saw a revival from the 1980s on. This is due to his magnum opus, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer 2010). The aim of this project was to develop a theory of the cognitive functions and expressions of human beings. Cassirer's approach is thus predestined to on the one hand, fill the methodological gap of the formation of a concept of globalization, and on the other hand, to build a bridge between cultural philosophy and ethics. The question was no longer how we recognize the world, but: how do we understand it?

From a functional theory of experience to the philosophy of symbolic forms

Cassirer's starting point was a critique of the classical and formal process of abstraction, which also forms the starting point of knowledge for the concept of globalization. The common understanding was that a definition or essence could be made or found by finding commonalities and differences between the term-related objects, which are then constitutive for the term itself. In order to enrich the criticism in content, it is helpful to show that 'classical approach' in reference to globalization. Roughly understood, globalization is the intensification of worldwide relations in the fields of politics, economy and culture.

Whether concerning provisions of the European Union, the Böhmermann-Erdogan debate in Germany or the international refugee crisis, for all examples it is true that they cannot be explained without supranational influences. Due to growing interdependencies, the autonomy of the nation state has reached its limits (Osterhammel / Petersson 2007). Jürgen Habermas described this as the 'post-national constellation' (Habermas 1998, p. 91). He argues that the national state alone cannot fill the new gaps of legitimacy. Global and trans-national institutions such as the UN and the EU should undertake this task. The hope was an increasing legalization. The most obvious discussion was the tendency towards universalization in terms of human rights. For example, Martha Nussbaum as-

sumes that pre-state claims provide a plausible foundation for a global human rights regime (Nussbaum 1999).

This is even more noticeable in the area of economics. Production, price development, employment relationships, etc. can no longer be understood without global references. In every book about globalization, the claim is made that the economic constraints comprise the driving force behind the delimitation movement, and that the market is the determining factor over all other existing systems (politics, social affairs, culture). It is not without cause that the renowned economist Jagdish Bhagwati defends himself against globalization critics when he highlights globalization as the “most powerful source for social good in the world” (Bhagwati 2007). For example, pertaining to the issue of child labor, institutionalization can be a helpful way to end it. Border crossing is not only evident at the level of organizations such as WTO or large global corporations, but also on a small scale. Most products we buy were produced under completely different conditions in other countries. Not only does the western market depend on extra-state production—it furthermore influences the living conditions in Third World countries, as scandals about productions in Bangladesh (for example) show. Exploitation, cheap labor, child labor and poverty are consequences of global production. Hence, it seems that the economy has developed its own dynamics and logic. Under the term ‘capitalism’ and in the context of the economic crisis of 2008, the problem of such trends was revealed. However, it became clear that these problems can only be controlled and addressed on a global level.

In the field of culture, the rapid development of information and communication technologies blurs the self-containment of cultural identities. Like the appropriation of mangas in the west or the takeover of Bavarian beer house culture in Asia, cultural products are detached from their context and free for adaptation. Byung-Chul Han therefore speaks of ‘hyperculture’: “The limits or fencing, to which the appearance of a cultural authenticity or originality is imprinted, dissolves. Culture is bursting at the seams.” (Han 2005, p. 16) Rather, cultures coexist and change each other at the same time. Nevertheless, attempts to speak of a ‘world society’ are common (Beck 1998; Luhmann 1975). The coincidence of the two viewpoints leads not only to productive mixing and pluralization, but also to severe cultural conflicts (occident/orient), as well as to reciprocal transformation of cultures.

Overall, the lowest common denominator is that all definition or description of globalization focuses on the delimitation thesis. They only differ in that some see this as a weakening (interdependence, globalization as a network) or strengthening (homogenization, universalization) process. The examples given

here are only a fraction of the current discussion, but sufficiently serve the purpose of giving an empiricism of the delimitation of boundaries.

However, it would not be sufficient to simply follow Cassirer's critique of the 'classical' approach of abstraction. In his view, the most general terms are those with the least content, and thus the importance of the phenomenon cannot be grasped. Globalization is not simply a generic term, but is only understandable in the context of different concepts and theories like trans-nationalization, denationalization, capitalism, economization, multiculturalism or deterritorialization. Concepts, as Cassirer quite Kantianly says, "cannot be taken from the realm of subject matter that they are supposed to explain." (Paetzold 2008, p. 29) The philosophy of the symbolic forms seeks to clarify this overall connection between constitution (what characterizes the concept and makes it functional) and construction (the function that the concept itself takes over). Therefore, terms are representations and parts of an overall system. Following Gerald Hartung's analysis of Cassirer: "Instead of a theory of scientific thinking, an analysis of all paths is necessary on which reality is merged into a cognitive cosmos [i.e. globalization]." (Hartung 2006, p. 219)

Symbolic forms are forms that help us to understand and to create an understanding of the world. Man becomes the creator of the world through his own mental activity. The comprehensive approach of the project is reflected in the determination of the human being as an 'animal symbolicum'. Then, culture is understood as an organic whole: "Whenever man becomes aware of and perceives the world, things and oneself, it requires mediation through symbolic forms." (Müller 2010, p. 15) Therefore, the philosophy of symbolic forms, understood as 'cultural criticism', allows us to understand different spaces of experience; in the specific language, these are myth, religion, science, technology and lastly politics. Returning to the concept of globalization, it is true that with the concept of delimitation, the core of that movement is grasped—but this explanation is one-dimensional. That means, the moments of globalization "cannot be listed in isolation or even divided into different kinds of globalization which we then work through accordingly." (Gedinat 2015, p.7)

Globalization as a symbolic form

It is no small claim to understand globalization as a 'symbolic form'. As part of the Cassirer-examined forms like language, myth, religion, science and technology, globalization seems not to be taken for granted. Nevertheless, so the thesis, the basic functions can also be found. Globalization has become a form between constitution and construction, through which specific phenomena of economy,

technology, politics or society can be interpreted. In other words: globalization comes necessarily to one's mind when thinking about such spheres. The term is used to explain everything and thus has become a non-explanation. Everything would actually already have been said with the answer: 'It's all about globalization'—but nothing would have been understood.

We live in the 'age of globalization' (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie 2016), the dawning of which the BMWi dates with the year 1998, and in which processes of internationalization, acceleration and interdependence are omnipresent. However, reference is not made to concrete forms of globalization, nor to the necessity that arises due to it—a necessity that already created a discourse about the end of this era (Straubhaar 2016), because internationalization set countermovements in motion, which undermine the original processes of globalization (nationalism, protectionism). Nevertheless, maybe this is not the end, just the other side of the coin. If globalization is a symbolic form, both sides can be connected in a productive way. It is no longer about the search for the core or similarities of all the things related to globalization, but rather the attempt to understand the meaning of the term. Such an attempt is analogous to Cassirer's investigations and can be roughly divided into four levels: Globalization as a worldview, void, myth and the consequences for the subject.

Globalization as a worldview

Firstly, it must be discussed which function the term 'globalization' has besides a reduction to the lowest common denominator. It is important to ask how the meanings of specific phenomena were changed by globalization, and thus also changed the meaning of the term itself. Globalization is therefore not only determined through its *differentia specifica*, it is furthermore a normative pattern of interpretation—a worldview. This view is especially characterized by its paradoxical structure: "Depending on the perspective, it appears either positively as a de-ideologizing, liberating tendency, or negatively as a violence which infiltrates the remnants of human life and completely changes social systems and cultures." (Schweppenhäuser / Gleiter 1999, p. 6) This can be easily shown by looking at the aforementioned areas of politics, economy and culture.

There was the hope that through the processes of globalization values such as democracy and human rights would spread worldwide. 'Cosmopolitan city', 'world system' and 'cosmopolitanism' were the terms on which such a debate focused. Worldwide entanglements were considered as possibly producing the civilization of the world. Thus, with the statement of the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992), Francis Fukuyama represented the thesis that with democracy, liberalism

and market economy, the dominant models of world order had prevailed, and alternatives no longer seemed plausible. That lack of alternatives only leads to gradual distortions within the dominant system. The core of these theses can be pinpointed, on the eve of the popularity of globalization, to the prevailing dominance of modernization theories. These theories assumed that history has to be understood as a progressive and rational process, which leads to social, political and economic improvements; and furthermore, that the movement of delimitation and globalization are among the categories of modernity itself (Giddens 1995). It is stressed as a criticism of these concepts that on the one hand, they hide the dark sides of globalization, like poverty or the rapid degradation of the environment, while on the other hand, an increasingly Eurocentric perspective legitimizes western hegemony (from colonialism to capitalism).

That, 25 years after the appearance of Fukuyama's thesis, the world has not developed into unity illustrates the problem of such a project. The crises are striking: whether politically, such as the Ukraine crisis or the conflicts in the Middle East; economically, such as the finding that the living conditions "between and within individual world regions and societies have remained extremely unequal or even diverging" (Debiel / Roth / Ulbert 2010, p. 16); or culturally, such as the lack of equality between men and women. Therefore, current globalization theories try to thematize that contradiction.

In this sense, it is not accidental that Ernst Bloch's description of the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous' (Bloch 1985, p. 104) got a revival in the context of globalization. The sociologist Armin Nassehi expresses this interaction in terms of ethical questions:

It [globalization] denotes both a specter, which threatened our beautiful social peace and the reasonably functioning model of tamed capitalism, and the possibility of reversing regional particularisms in favor of that state two hundred years ago, as mankind as an inclusion formula should provide those forces that can liberate us from self-inflicted immaturity. The talk of globalization legitimates both social atrocities in political decisions and the hope that the One World, of which the 1970s alternative and third world movements spoke as a provocation, have now become reality. (Nassehi 1999, p. 21)

In Robert Robertson we can find a similar representation. In his article "Glocalization: Homogeneity and heterogeneity in space and time" (Robertson 1998), he said that globalization mainly comes from a coexistence of different effects and dimensions. For example, smartphones and internet access are now widespread worldwide, even in the poorest regions. Simultaneously, much of the production of these devices is based on the exploitation of raw materials in developing countries. Ironically, amazement at the image of a refugee with a smartphone

shows how much western thinking is still arrested in the modernization paradigm.

Ulf Engel and Matthias Middell therefore used the term ‘fracture zones of globalization’ (Engel / Middell 2010, p. 23) in their book about the similarities and differences among 26 globalization theorists, to represent the doubt that all the different phenomena can be meaningfully brought together. It shows a differentiated picture of delimitation, which can be only understood in its plurality and contradictoriness:

[The] world in the sense of shared values and universally accepted principles and standards for tackling global challenges only exists in a rudimentary state. Despite global communication, transnational migration, technology transfer and the proliferation of Western consumption patterns, the worlds still remain alien to one another. (Debiel / Roth / Ulbert 2010, p. 25)

In recent years, the opposite trend has been particularly clear in the rise of populist movements in the western world. They are considered as the voice of ‘globalization losers’ (Titz 2016)—people who understand their loss of work, reduced income or general slipping into precarious situations as an outcome of globalization. As the example of the smartphone and, furthermore, research on consequences of global warming make visible, vulnerabilities are unfairly distributed (Reder 2009, pp. 130–131).

It is useful to ask whether this type of ‘western globalization loser’ is not in fact a special cohort, since it is located within the large cohort of globalization winners. If this thesis is correct, it reveals more obviously the changed meaning of globalization. A recently published study by the Bertelsmann Foundation shows that about half of the citizens of Europe fear globalization. The word has become a cipher for ‘automation, migration and international banking’ (Titz 2016). It is no longer a principle of hope, but a threat. The same can be said for the United States, if the election of Donald Trump can be referred back to his critical positions on globalization. These examples show that globalization also includes movements back to the local, to nationalism and protectionism.

As mentioned above, not only are the experiences of globalization different, but so too are the associated normative criteria. Globalization is thus not only local, in terms of a center-periphery thesis, but also temporally and normatively contradictory. Even more striking is the desire previously associated with this process of control and security, now changed to the experience of fear of being out of control. Globalization stands symbolically for a worldview at the end of the expiring twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Overall, the commonality is based on the experience of helplessness and of

being exposed to a structure—one that obeys only its own logic and is beyond the control of human powers. Gedinat states: “We do not control the process of globalization. For us it is out of control. At the same time it determines our living conditions in principle.” (Gedinat 2015, p.16)

Globalization as a void

Secondly, this implies that globalization contains a kind of surplus or transcendental moment. It is not just the reservoir of individual phenomena—it is also in its entirety beyond our reach. This becomes obvious when looking at the explanations of the global financial crisis of 2008. Despite attempts to make the interrelations comprehensible to everyone through the use of words like ‘financial bubble’ or ‘hedge funds’, the concrete mechanisms remain understandable to only a very small percentage of experts. Rather, the traceability of whatever provoked the crisis is no longer be achievable.

The aforementioned complexity and diversity of using the term ‘globalization’ now becomes a problem. The empirical process itself is withdrawn or unavailable to us. If the concept of globalization remains unavailable, why do we need and use such a term at all? At this point, many assertions about anthropological questions and questions of transcendence can be made. However, with Cassirer’s functional theory of experience and aspect of meaning, two theses can be highlighted.

On the one hand, Cassirer emphasizes that human beings are dependent on something like meaning. Although it is initially a circular argument, since the search for meaning is proved by the elaboration of symbolic forms, evidence can nevertheless be found in psychology and philosophical anthropology. Passive perceptions must primarily be transformed in reality. Acting is not just a reaction; it assumes a meaningful understanding. On the other hand, it should be noted that the functional necessity of a superordinate phenomenon such as globalization is simply a response to the rampant excess of information. Changed material conditions and the ever-increasing de-bordering and interconnectedness of the world lead to the development of a term like globalization, in order to be able to understand and order them. As a ‘historical *a priori*’, the term then affects the interpretation of the singular phenomena.

According to Cassirer, precisely this is the function of meaning of symbolic forms:

In the meaning function these two moments, the constant change and the constancy of things, become dialectical counterpoints. [...] The meaning structure relates no longer to

objects of the illustrative world, but their constancy underlying links, to their intrinsic structure. (Kralemann 2000, p. 47).

The definitions of globalization and the emphasis on its paradoxes outlined above strikingly match Cassirer's conception. Theoretically, Hartmut Rosa's notion of 'acceleration' is an analogy in which he describes the 'silent, normative violence' of modern life (Rosa 2005, p. 481).

Globalization as a myth

Thirdly, Cassirer provides analogies of globalization and the concept of myth. This does not mean to show that globalization is a myth, which would 'negate' the mythical understanding by looking at these things from a scientific standpoint (Cassirer 1990, p. 119). Rather, to understand myth means to develop an understanding within the mythical framework. This is also true for globalization. Utilizing a strictly scientific perspective, we only grasp a part of its purpose. Even if the concept itself is empirically a myth, the actual use of the term is not. Without giving a detailed summary of Cassirer's theory of myth, some points can be highlighted.

In the first place, Cassirer identifies the same goal in myth as in science. Both try to develop an appropriate and reasonable understanding of the world. "For even magic argues and acts upon the presupposition that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency." (Cassirer 1972, p. 76) It is also possible to view globalization as a result of forces and actions beyond the realm of human influence. Especially in the case of economics, an independent process can be identified. If Elmar Altvater writes that "the inner pressure of global market is relentless" (Altvater 2009, p. 206), then his criticism is directed against an apparent necessity or naturalness that connects globalization with a lack of alternatives.

Furthermore, essential for mythical thinking is the emotional nature of perception. Instead of the experience through senses, it is primarily the experience of passions. 'Physiognomic qualities' are in opposition to 'qualities of perception' (Cassirer 1972, p. 77). The usual explanations of globalization inevitably fall short, because they do treat the emotional part of this debate seriously. The political approach toward globalization in particular is in itself evidence that emotional understanding has priority. "The world of myth is a dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers" (Cassirer 1972, p. 67)—much like the reactions to globalization. It also seems to be an interplay of forces:

we do not judge from an observer's perspective; rather the effects of globalization are directly experienced.

According to Cassirer, the most important point of mythological thinking is the dissolution of the interplay of forces to form a picture of the whole. Myths integrate all things from social to natural phenomena:

Life is not divided into classes and subclasses. It is felt as an unbroken continuous whole, which does not admit to any clean-cut and trenchant distinctions. The limits between the different spheres are not insurmountable barriers; they are fluent and fluctuating. (Cassirer 1972, p. 81)

A similar description can be found in books about globalization. For example, Giddens and Reder both show that the process of globalization is defined as a process of border transgression or automatic leveling. It is more a perceived than a factual dissolution.

However, by looking at Cassirer's terms like 'solidarity of life', 'unity of life' and 'society of life' (Cassirer 1972, pp. 82–83), it can be doubted that myth and globalization are the same. The former refers to forms of equality and support, while the latter displays a lack of solidarity. Inequality increases even more. The unity of globalization is a unity of differences.

Globalization and subjectivity

Lastly, it is necessary to ask which consequences can be drawn for the subject from the previous. If Cassirer's belief that our categories of knowledge and concepts form the basis of our view of the world is true, then it has to be taken for granted that the idea of globalization has an influence on our self-conception.

However, globalization not only means the dissolution of the forms described above—it also puts conventional ideas of 'subjectivity' and 'identity' into question. In the sense of postmodern diversity, the stabilizing unity of the subject is in danger. The idea of always being and having to be at one with oneself in this world only leads to disappointment and the feeling of failure. As shown in the context of space and time, the increasing instability of the concepts leads to a deterioration of values. Human beings are bound to physical abilities, and thus when compared to technology are no longer in a competitive position. Cases like this show that people start to feel helpless and overburdened, which is the reason for a retreat into fixed identities. This is the attempt to preserve the individual status quo with a greater awareness of the roots of the accident, the re-discovery of religion or the German discussion about a dominant

culture—things that follow from a ‘disorientation of the subjective world’ (Figueroa 2004, p. 11).

Interestingly, difference occurs less in already non-homogeneous cities than in rural areas. Of course, economic factors and education still play a crucial role, but roughly, through the expanded mobility and the inclusion of supraregional cultural products, the appropriation of new perspectives is more widespread than in history so far. Even if the media in the western world focuses on cultural conflicts, the change is small by comparison to other world regions. The increase of migration movements in particular show that with the consciousness of a globalized world and the knowledge of the other, a life outside the regional framework and under new and better conditions is possible.

The attempt to preserve the particular is not only found in a rising nationalism—Colin Crouch speaks of a nationalism that is itself globalized (Crouch 2017, p. 1)—but rather also as a tendency of globalization research. Due to the danger of leveling and disorientation, it is important to emphasize the individual and the special. Byung-Chul Han radicalizes the individual approach when he understands the expanded and huge ‘fund of life forms and practices’ (Han 2005, p. 55) as enabling a new dimension of individualization. Hence, the new openness is not just a drive back to regional homogeneity—it is an extended possibility of freely living out one’s own ideas.

However, Cassirer’s adaptation of Ernst Kapp’s philosophical theses can be read similarly. Kapp’s thesis of ‘organ projection’ describes technology as an outsourced form of human wish fulfillment (Kapp 1877, p. 30). As Cassirer states, technology not only negatively changes the cognitive conditions of man—it can also expand these conditions in a positive way. Technology creates new possibilities of self-experience. It forms the basis of an opening to the other by exceeding the otherwise limited communication radius. Globalization as a worldview can be interpreted in two directions: on the one hand, as a thinking of withdrawal and delimitation; and on the other hand, as a cosmopolitan attitude and an appearance of equal individualization. This ambivalence becomes obvious in the political trench fights of western societies: management of contingency vs consciousness of contingency. However, both worldviews have delimitation and associated powerlessness as a basis. They only differ significantly in their handling of this.

Both are consequences of the break with the identity concepts proclaimed by postmodern theories and the changes in the living world through globalization. In this respect, it belongs to the modern or post-modern self-understanding to be variable at the core: on the one hand, to keep it consistent to be one at that moment and another in the next moment; and on the other hand, this leads to radicalization by maintaining and defending identity. Whether or not the individual

faces the task, the question of the ‘self’ is no longer taken for granted. A good example is Richard Rorty’s description of the ‘liberal ironist’ (Rorty 1992, pp. 14–15). In this figure, self-creation and solidarity are equivalent and incommensurable at the same moment.

Globalization as a consciousness of paradox

As the concluding result, all the different aspects of globalization have to be brought together on an abstract level to understand globalization as a concept as such. According to Cassirer, the importance of globalization can only be understood when we concentrate on its function in the overall system. Such a process allows reflection on the constitutional conditions of such a term, and does not simply interpret it as a collection of different phenomena.

Classically, with globalization it is said that everything is in some way connected with everything. This is how Anthony Giddens formulates it in his book *Consequences of Modernity*:

The term globalization can be defined in the sense of an intensification of worldwide social relationships in that remote places are connected in such a way that events in one place are influenced by events that are located many miles away and vice versa. (Giddens 1995, p. 85)

According to Hamid Reza Yousefi, globalization is thus the change of one consciousness, by no longer assuming that singular areas can be understood on their own. As he states, they instead “overlap in many ways, contradict, complement or combat.” (Yousefi 2010, p. 27) The striking conclusion began to spread that a purely substantive definition of globalization cannot be given. Angelika Eppele recommends that we cease trying to use the concept of globalization universally:

Globalization is considered a pluralistic, non-linear, non-teleological and as a multi-layered and asymmetric interconnecting process of different speeds, which is driven forward by individual and collective actors, slowed down, transformed and changed. To analyze the different layers, it makes sense to use the term in plural. (Eppele 2014).

I have attempted above to characterize the definitions alluded to here. Even if different authors agree in principle with the dissolution thesis, when trying to formulate it they end up with an emphasis on overlaps and contradictions. As banal as this may sound, a certain understanding of the world is evident. As a ‘connection without contour’, the meaning of globalization lacks the order that serves as a meaning-giving element. The concepts of border crossing and

unification remain disordered. In more complicated terms, globalization is an 'understanding network' through which, as stated above, not a concrete or causal relationship is understood. Rather, it gives us an awareness of what we are: on the one hand, powerless against the contingency and the changing structures of the world; on the other hand, through the freedom of contingency empowered to act in and create the world.

The aforementioned contourlessness then becomes more precisely described as a 'consciousness of paradox'. Whether speaking about 'condition and process' (Osterhammel, Petersson), 'Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous' (Bloch, Nassehi), 'dismay without involvement' (Reder), 'overcoming the overwhelming' (Gedinat), 'Glocalization' (Robertson), 'non-solidarity unity', 'space-dependent spatial independence' (Harvey) or 'contourless connection', it is always necessary to refer to opposing elements to understand globalization. The emphasis on paradoxes and contradictions has now become a scientific commonsense, and is promoted as the end of the globalization paradigm. A singular concept dissolves everything in a comprehensive movement, which is why it only makes sense to understand globalization as a 'symbolic form'—a function of human world development. Therefore, much can be said for treating the concept of globalization as a worldview. Only then can one understand why globalization has become the symbol of our time: on the one hand occupied with universalistic claims, on the other hand permeated by particular fears. Globalization as a symbolic form is not, as presented in the Encyclopedia of globalization, the mere "continuation and continuity of a long-standing process" (Kreff / Knoll / Gingrich 2011, p. 16). Rather, globalization—with the thesis of the 'historical *a priori*' and the acceptance of Foucault's adoption and further development of the philosophy of symbolic forms—is a historically changeable condition of possibility of the visible, the expressible, the knowable. It is a picture of our time. To refrain from a uniform understanding of globalization, the benefit of the term must lie in its linguistic and meaningful assistance in communicating and understanding a paradoxical structure. What remains doubtful is whether globalization can retain the intention of enlightenment, as Cassirer hoped.

Nevertheless, as Cassirer puts it, it is a matter of philosophy to ask not just what role globalization plays, but also what role it *should* play. Only in the analysis of a symbolic consciousness can globalization be understood and criticized. Globalization can then be understood as a task itself. In the spirit of Cassirer, this task means to take globalization as self-empowerment and to take responsibility for shaping the world positively and seriously, in order to free oneself from powerlessness through critical reflection. As paradoxical and contradictory as the figure of globalization may be, it is not only necessary, but also changeable. Radically speaking, by the obviousness of the contradictions, one must not seek

them out for a long time. They are ready for modification. Viewed positively, globalization can be understood—as a symbolic form—as a chance to convey the idea of plurality.

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