

On Human Sciences: Dialogues Between Ernst Cassirer and Mikhail Bakhtin / *Sobre as ciências humanas: diálogos entre Ernst Cassirer e Mikhail Bakhtin*

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ABSTRACT

Many studies, aiming to analyze the philosophical roots of the ideas of the so-called “Bakhtin Circle,” have shown some convergences between the thought of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the ideas outlined by the Circle’s authors. Therefore, in this article, we seek to compare Cassirer’s theories about “cultural sciences” with Bakhtin’s reflections on these same sciences. Throughout the article, we point out similarities and differences in the discussions presented by the two authors. We highlight a clear similarity in the ways in which the authors (Cassirer and Bakhtin) approach the object of human sciences as opposed to the object of natural sciences, based on the idea of “personification” and “thingification” (Bakhtin) and knowledge of the “other” and knowledge of the “thing” (Cassirer). We concluded that this similarity would be due to the reading that both authors would have made of the works of Scheler, Dilthey and Rickert.

KEYWORDS: Human sciences; Mikhail Bakhtin; Ernst Cassirer

RESUMO

Muitos estudos, visando analisar as raízes filosóficas das ideias do chamado “Círculo de Bakhtin”, têm mostrado algumas convergências entre o pensamento do filósofo alemão Ernst Cassirer e as ideias delineadas pelos autores do Círculo. Sendo assim, procuramos, neste artigo, comparar as teorizações de Cassirer sobre as “ciências culturais” com as reflexões tecidas por Bakhtin sobre essas mesmas ciências. Apontamos, ao longo do artigo, semelhanças e diferenças entre as discussões apresentadas pelos dois autores. Destacamos uma nítida semelhança nos modos como os autores (Cassirer e Bakhtin) abordam o objeto das ciências humanas em contraposição ao objeto das ciências naturais, a partir da ideia de “personificação” e “coisificação” (Bakhtin) e conhecimento do “outro” e conhecimento da “coisa” (Cassirer). Concluímos que essa semelhança seria decorrente da leitura que ambos os autores teriam feito das obras de Scheler, Dilthey e Rickert.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ciências humanas; Mikhail Bakhtin; Ernst Cassirer

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Introduction

Many studies, aiming to analyze the philosophical roots of the ideas of the so-called “Bakhtin Circle,” have investigated convergences and influences between the thought of contemporary philosophers of M. Bakhtin, P. Medvedev and V. Vološinov and the thought of the Circle. In this sense, much research (Marchezan, 2019; Faraco, 2009; Grillo, 2017; Brandist, 1997, 2012; Lofts, 2000, 2016) has shown convergences between the thoughts of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the ideas outlined by the aforementioned Russian authors.

When analyzing Mikhail Bakhtin’s early work, specifically the essay *Towards a Philosophy of Act*, Lofts (2016)¹ argues that Bakhtin was “in tune” with the intellectual spirit of his time and with the philosophy of the 20th century. According to Lofts (2016, p. 74),² there is an “intellectual harmony” between Bakhtin’s thought and some of Ernst Cassirer’s theses, since both authors seek to “reconcile two antithetical philosophical positions that were dominant at the beginning of the 20th century: Kant’s transcendental philosophy, or Neo-Kantianism, and the *Lebensphilosophie* of Simmel, Bergson and Heidegger.” Thus, in his article, Lofts (2016)³ seeks not so much to show probable influences that the German author Ernst Cassirer exerted on Bakhtin’s philosophy, but to analyze the “intellectual harmony” between the two thinkers.

Adopting this thesis of an “intellectual harmony” between Bakhtin and Cassirer, in this article, we seek to compare Cassirer’s theorizations about “cultural sciences” with the reflections made by Bakhtin about these same sciences. Throughout this text, we point out similarities and differences in the discussions presented by the two authors.

As we know, science is one of the objects of Ernst Cassirer’s theorization. His first work, *Substance and Function*,⁴ deals with the ways in which the exact sciences (more specifically Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics) construct their objects. The author criticizes the “traditional logical doctrine of the concept” (Cassirer, 1923)⁵ and in

¹ LOFTS, S. G. Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Event and the Machine. *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 11(1): 70-88, Jan./April. 2016

² For reference, see footnote 1.

³ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁴ CASSIRER, E. *Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*. Translation by William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey. Chicago – London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1923.

⁵ For reference, see footnote 4.

this work, presents the concept of “function,” which will form the basis of his subsequent work – the three volumes of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The last of these three volumes is dedicated to the phenomenology of knowledge, focusing on the constitution of the object of Physics and Mathematics.

After the publication of the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer produced the book *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*⁶ during his period of exile in Sweden. In this work, he analyzes the logic of cultural sciences, and in five studies, highlighting the particularities of the ways in which these sciences construct their methods and objects.

Although Bakhtin did not specifically dedicate himself to an epistemological analysis, he makes important contributions to the thinking of human sciences in his “unfinished essays” (we are referring here to the texts *From Notes Made in 1970-71; Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences; The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis*, Bakhtin, 1986).⁷ In these essays, inspiring reflections on the “sciences of the spirit” are outlined.

In this article, we will discuss a “curious harmony” (to appropriate the expression used by Lofts, 2016)⁸ between the way in which the authors contrast the object of human sciences (the “cultural sciences” or “sciences of the spirit,” according to the terminology of that time) to the object of natural sciences. Both authors – Cassirer and Bakhtin – oppose “thingification” (objectification), typical of natural sciences, to “personification,” typical of cultural sciences.

This article is divided into four parts, in addition to this introduction. In the topic “The perception of the thing *versus* the perception of the other,” we will deal with the categorizations made by Cassirer about the perceptual phenomenon, focusing on the author’s discussions about two distinct types of perceptual experience: the experience of the thing and the experience of the other (or “the experience of the thou”). Next, in the topic “The logic of the cultural sciences,” we will address how Cassirer resumed discussions about perceptual experience in the work *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*

⁶In original: *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*. To write this article, we had access to the translation of the work in English.

⁷BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres, and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

⁸For reference, see footnote 1.

(Cassirer, 2000), in order to substantiate distinctions in the ways in which the natural sciences and cultural sciences construct their object of analysis. In the subsequent topic, “The specificity of the human sciences in Bakhtin’s view,” we will discuss the reflections made by Bakhtin regarding human sciences, comparing these reflections with those made by Ernst Cassirer. Final considerations are presented in the last topic.

1 The Perception of the Thing *Versus* the Perception of the Other

To understand the differences that Cassirer presents between natural sciences and human sciences, we must initially highlight the emphasis given by the author to the different modes of perceptual experience. In effect, the perceptual experience grounds the author’s central concepts, such as the concept of symbolic forms in their modes of meaning configuration. Myth, language, and science, as symbolic forms that tend toward the poles of expression, representation, and meaning, are also understood as different ways of constructing human perception.

In the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, when justifying the analysis of the expressive function, the author (Cassirer, 1957)⁹ states that the world is not given to us in advance in fixed classes; consequently, there are different ways of symbolizing the world. The philosopher explains the difference between two basic types of perceptual experience: the experience of the thing and the experience of the other (or “the experience of the thou”). He argues that the empirical world and even the theoretical world are not “originally experienced as a totality of physical bodies, endowed with definite attributes and qualities” (Cassirer, 1957, p. 62).¹⁰ Prior to this type of experience of reality, there is another form of experience, another mode of perception in which the being of things is not apprehended as an object, “but as a kind of presence of living subjects” (Cassirer, 1957, p. 62).¹¹

The “experience of the thing” is the experience of the empirical world based on the segmentation of the world into things and attributes and causal relationships.

⁹ CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume three: The Phenomenology of Knowledge. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 9.

Language and science are forms of symbolization that bring us to the state of “things.” Language is responsible for initially fixing the real experienced in things and attributes, through the act of naming. This – the act of naming the world – interrupts the incessant flow of perceptual experiences, stabilizes a certain state of affairs, which are then detached from the experiential torrent, by the recognition of constant characters (Cassirer, 1980).¹² Language leads us, therefore, to a process of “progressive objectification” (Cassirer, 1944),¹³ a continuous process of stabilization and structuring empirical reality.

Constancy – of the Self and of things –, that is, the perception of subjects and objects as something uniform, as recognizable and detachable beings in different experiential situations, is a basic requirement of the “experience of the thing.” In volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer states (1957, p. 77)¹⁴ that “only in the medium of language do the infinite diversity, the surging multiformity of expressive experiences begin to be fixated.” Science, in turn, continues the work begun by language. In both forms of symbolization – language and science – we have the action of *logos*. However, language is still a symbolic form riddled with representative ambiguity, with expressive modes and intuitive faculties acting in their logical constructions. In the chapter “Language and science: Signs of things and signs of orders,” contained in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the philosopher continues discussions begun in volume 1, about the way in which language institutes the process of objectification of the world, through the “signs of things” (that is, linguistic signs), “preparing the ground” for a new organ of symbolization, represented by the “signs of orders” of science.

The perception of the thing (initially conferred by language and intensified by science) is not, however, as Cassirer argues, the only way of “living,” of “experiencing” reality. There is, so to speak, a previous layer, a first substrate of experience of the world. To argue about this possibility of other forms of experience of the world, the philosopher (1957)¹⁵ cites mythical experience – in mythical experience, there is not exactly this

¹² CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume One: Language. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

¹³ CASSIRER, E. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 9.

“experience of the thing,” since the mythical world is not structured in things and attributes and in causal relationships. In the mythical world, a *fluidity* of the formations of being predominates and not a strict division into classes and genders. The author (Cassirer, 1957)¹⁶ argues that this fluidity of the mythical world would not be apprehended “if immediate perception” contained a division into classes in its essence. If the world were conditioned by such a strict division, the mode of mythical experience would be the result of hallucination or a state of “madness.”

However, as he presents in detail in the second volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer, 1955),¹⁷ myth is a perfectly functional and structured mode of symbolization – a mode that evidently does not obey the operating laws of the logic of natural science, but which is not, on the other hand, devoid of its own logic. Furthermore, the author (Cassirer, 1957;¹⁸ 1946¹⁹) argues that myth never disappears completely, although it is modified by theoretical science.

If, in the mythical perception of the world, there is no strict division of being into things and attributes, the philosopher argues that there is, alongside the perception of the thing, another perceptual mode that would constitute the mythical vision. To support this thesis, he cites studies (Cassirer, 1957)²⁰ that prove from a genetic point of view – whether phylogenesis or ontogenesis –, that there is not primarily a perception of the thing in itself; another mode of perception prevails in the early stages of life: a mode of perception in which a much more “lively” and “emotional” view of the world predominates. The author calls this mode of perception “perception of the other (thou)”²¹ as opposed to “perception of the thing (it).”

The “perception of the other (thou)” consists of a singular mode of perception that tends to give “life” to the experienced phenomenon. Let’s look at the excerpt below:

In any event, immersion in the phenomenon of perception shows us one thing – that the perception of life is not exhausted by the mere

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹⁷ CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume Two: Mythical Thought. Translated by Raplh Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹⁹ CASSIRER, E. *The Myth of the State*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946.

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

²¹ “How such an experience of alien subjects, an experience of the ‘thou’ is possible may present itself as a difficult metaphysical or epistemological question” (Cassirer, 1957, p. 62).

perception of things, *that the experience of the “thou” can never be dissolved into an experience of the mere “it,”* or reduced to it even by the most complex conceptual mediation. The farther back we trace perception, *the greater becomes the preeminence of the “thou” form over the “it,” form, and the more plainly the purely expressive character takes precedence over the matter or thing* (Cassirer, 1957, p. 63, our highlights).²²

The excerpt above reminds us, as we will discuss later, of the considerations that Bakhtin makes about human sciences, as opposed to natural sciences: the perception of the world not as a thing, but as something *personified* – that is, the two limits of knowledge, “the mere dead thing” (Bakhtin, 1986),²³ as an extreme; the knowledge of the individual, “dialogue, interrogation, prayer” (Bakhtin, 1986),²⁴ in a second extreme. In this second “extreme,” according to the author, we have the *expressive and speaking* being. Therefore, this “being” cannot be perceived as a thing, as a “mere mute thing.” In this being, always resonate voices and senses.

When approaching these “two extremes” of perception – conceived by the German philosopher as perceptual modes that equally underlie the apprehension of the object of natural sciences and human sciences, as we will discuss in a later topic –, Cassirer (1957),²⁵ very similarly to Bakhtin (1986),²⁶ points out that the perception of the thing tends to apprehend the being as something “dead,” devoid of expressiveness. The perception of the other (thou), in turn, apprehends the being as something expressive, something in which, at all times, life resonates. In his words: “If an expressive meaning were not revealed to us in certain perceptive experiences, existence would remain silent for us.” (Cassirer, 1957, p. 73).²⁷

We highlight the idea that the perception of the other, the perception arising from the mere phenomenon of expression, apprehends the being not as something “mute,” but as an expressive being, which “speaks,” that is, a being in which meanings resonate, because this idea reminds us a lot of Bakhtin’s theses, especially the essays by this

²² For reference, see footnote 9.

²³ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 9.

Russian author which address the methodology of human sciences (*From Notes Made in 1970-71; Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, Bakhtin, 1986).²⁸

Cassirer's writings, however, focus much more on the phenomenological character of perception, tending to characterize the two basic modes of apprehension of reality – “thingification” (or objectification) and “personification” – which ultimately underlie symbolic forms: myth, as a symbolic form that tends towards expression; language, as a symbolic form that is based on “objectification,” but that never completely abandons the expressive phenomenon; science (thinking of exact sciences), as a mode of symbolization that tends towards mere “thingification.” However, as we will discuss later, in the work *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, the author (Cassirer, 2000), when focusing specifically on the configuration of the “cultural” sciences, the “sciences of the spirit,” uses these two modes of apprehension of reality to characterize this last science in opposition to natural or exact sciences. And, certainly, Bakhtin does something very similar in his essays on the human sciences, notably in the essays *From Notes Made in 1970-71* and *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences* (Bakhtin, 1986).²⁹

Still in the excerpt highlighted above, it is important to note that, for Cassirer (1957),³⁰ the expressive phenomenon is at the base, in the “soul,” of all perception. This expressive phenomenon is what allows us to grasp the world not as a mere object, as a “what,” but, above all, as a world of *meanings*, which seduces us or repels us; that seems familiar or scary, etc.

Cassirer (1957)³¹ opposes empiricism in general, and specifically opposes empiricist Psychology, which approaches human perception as a simple sum of qualities given by the sense organ, based on (in his view) simplistic categories, as “association.” In the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the philosopher (Cassirer, 1957)³² cites studies by Kofka and Bühler to argue that our apprehension of the world is not given by the sum of sensual characters, in a direction that goes from “simple to

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

³¹ For reference, see footnote 9.

³² For reference, see footnote 9.

complex.” Cassirer (1957)³³ uses these studies to argue that the *expressive character* of the phenomenon is genetically prior to the perception of the mere thing itself.

The distinctions between the two modes of perceptual experience – experience of the thing and experience of the other – made in volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer, 1957),³⁴ are resumed by Cassirer in the work *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*. These distinctions underpin the analysis of the specificity of cultural sciences as opposed to natural sciences, as we will discuss below.

2 The Logic of Cultural Sciences

In *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, Cassirer (2000, p. 38) questions what the essence of cultural sciences would be. To answer this question, he states that we must turn to perception itself, with the aim of observing its subsequent development. The author then resumes the discussions presented in volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, about the double face of perceptual experience. He reinforces that the latter is made up of two elements “that are intimately fused in it, but neither can be reduced to the other” (Cassirer, 2000, p. 39). It is the perception of the thing or “it” and the perception of the other, or “perception of you.”

Theoretical science is constituted from the denial and even the elimination of the remnants of the “perception of you,” considering that, historically, this form of knowledge had to consolidate itself from the denial of the myth, whose roots are entrained in perceptive experience of mere expression. Cassirer (2000, p. 40) argues that science builds its world by replacing the expressive qualities that are experienced in the perception of you – the qualities of “trustworthy,” “terrifying,” “friendly” etc. – with merely sensitive qualities (such as colors, tones, etc.), and that even the latter must be reduced (or eliminated) in the subsequent development of science.

The author then deals with the dominance of “physicalism” and “mechanicism” in science and philosophy, which, in addition to completely denying the perception of you, the expressive color of perceptual phenomena, reduces the object to a physical

³³ For reference, see footnote 9.

³⁴ For reference, see footnote 9.

determination and a system of propositions. Cassirer (2000, p. 41) cites Carnap, who considers science to be a system of intersubjectively valid propositions, to oppose the latter author's physicalism, when addressing the specificity of the object of cultural sciences.

To Cassirer (2000), the exact sciences and cultural sciences constitute their objects tending to two distinct poles of perceptual experience. In the exact sciences, we have the pole of perception of the thing, based on the proposition of universal laws, in the terms thought by Carnap, and the analysis of the phenomenon based on causality. In cultural sciences, on the other hand, although we obviously have the constitution of a theoretical object (an "it"), we must understand that, in this object, the "color" of the expressive phenomenon still resonates. It is not a "mere dead thing" (and here we take the liberty of appropriating the Bakhtinian expression) determined by causal laws. Cultural objects are constituted not by these causal laws, but by the concepts of form and style.

The object of cultural sciences has a specificity, in the sense that it is a physical, historical, and psychological object, without being reduced to Physics, History, and Psychology. As Cassirer argues, the cultural object is a *synthesis* of these three aspects.

Regarding the physical constitution, Cassirer (2000) highlights that the cultural object – language, artistic objects, such as painting, sculpture, etc. – is, evidently, a physical, concrete object. Every cultural object has its place in space and time. But, at the same time as it occupies this space-time position, something "extra" emerges from this physicality. In the words of the philosopher (Cassirer, 2000, p. 43): "Not only does the physical 'exist' and 'become,' but in this being and becoming something else appears."

When addressing this physical existence of the cultural object, Cassirer cites, among other examples, the marble of Michelangelo's David, to argue that it is not exactly the value of the marble itself that "comes into play" in the constitution of the sculpture, but the representation of man. We remember that a similar example is used by Bakhtin in the essay *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* (Bakhtin, 1990);³⁵

³⁵ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* / by M. M. Bakhtin; edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translated and notes by Vadim Liapunov; supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990.

by Medvedev (1985),³⁶ in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*; by Vološinov (1976),³⁷ in the essay *Discourse in Life, Discourse in Art*. It is certainly unlikely that Russian authors formulated this example based on Cassirer's book (2000), considering the chronological precedence of the cited works themselves (Bakhtin, 1990;³⁸ Medvedev, 1985;³⁹ Vološinov, 1976⁴⁰). However, we highlight this “coincidence” in the examples shown to illustrate the “tuning” between thoughts, which alludes to a certain “harmony” in the ways in which Russian authors and the German author focus on culture, in the terms in which Lofts (2016)⁴¹ addresses in his article.

Still regarding the physical existence of the cultural object, Cassirer (2000) states that it has a double characteristic: the object is both “physical,” in the sense of occupying a place in space and manifesting itself at a given time, and in the sense of representing certain physical attitudes, which are emphasized. For example, a sculpture may be disproportionate in size to enhance what is being represented; the look of the character depicted in a painting can be considered intimidating or inviting to the beholder. In short, the physical is never “merely” physical, but always transcends this mere physical existence. To Cassirer (2000), the “something else” that emerges from material is the *symbolic value*.

Cassirer (2000) considers the cultural object (exemplified by painting) as a totality. There are three dimensions to be considered in this “whole”: physical existence (for example, the colors in the painting), what is objectively represented (the “scene” in the painting, which does not exactly end in the colors used by the artist), and the personal expression of the artist (the dialogue that the artist has with the public). To Cassirer (2000, p. 43), these three dimensions of the cultural object are decisive for analyzing the phenomena that result from human work: art, language, myths, religion, etc.

These three dimensions of the object to which Cassirer refers (the physical-material, the represented, and the authorial expression) immediately remind us of

³⁶ BAKHTIN, M. M./ MEDVEDEV, P. N. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985.

³⁷ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Freudism*. New York. Academic Press, 1976.

³⁸ For reference, see footnote 35.

³⁹ For reference, see footnote 36.

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 37.

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

Bakhtin's essay *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* (Bakhtin, 1990).⁴² In this essay, among other aspects, the Russian author deals with the three dimensions of the artistic object: material, content, and form. He also conceives the artistic object as a totality (a systematic “whole”), and thus, like Cassirer (2000, 1980),⁴³ demands that philosophy of culture play the role of analyzing this object in its particularities. However, it is necessary to point out that in this same essay, Bakhtin (1990)⁴⁴ presents a “differential” in relation to Cassirer – something that in previous work (Kemiatic, 2023),⁴⁵ we considered an “advance” in relation to Cassirerian studies –, since Bakhtin conceives cultural objects not only in their semiotic value, which would reduce art to mere technicality, seeing them, above all, as evaluative phenomena. We also highlight that Bakhtin (1990),⁴⁶ although he deals with the “cultural whole,” following his vision of culture as something that does not have “strictly defined borders,” presents an analysis that focuses on the aesthetic domain.

On the other hand, Cassirer's (2000) analysis focuses on what the author calls “cultural objects” as opposed to objects of natural or exact sciences. By “cultural object,” the German philosopher understands both artistic products (painting, sculpture, music, etc.), as well as language, myths, and religion. *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, according to Lofts (2000),⁴⁷ is conceived as “volume 4” of *The Philosophy of symbolic forms*, that is, as a continuation of Cassirer's studies on the domain of the symbolic. These studies culminates, in volume 3, with the analysis of science. In this last volume (Cassirer, 1957),⁴⁸ Cassirer focuses (more specifically in the last part of the book) on the modes of symbolic constitution of Physics and Mathematics. Therefore, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* comes to analyze the specific ways of symbolizing cultural sciences.

⁴² For reference, see footnote 35.

⁴³ For reference, see footnote 12.

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 35.

⁴⁵ KEMIATIC, L. On the Unity of Culture: Dialogues among Cassirer, Medvedev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin. *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 18 (3): e60006e, July/Sept.2023

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 35.

⁴⁷ Lofts (2000, p. xix) refers to the book (*Mein Leben mit Cassirer*) by Ernst Cassirer's wife, Toni Cassirer, in which the latter deals with their exile in Sweden, a period in which the philosopher would have mentioned that he was working on volume 4 of his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The logic of the cultural sciences was produced during this period of exile. For Lofts (2000), after having completed the analysis of the structure of mathematical sciences – an analysis that begins in the work *Substance and Function* – Cassirer turns his attention to the “sciences of the spirit.”

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 9.

Thus, when analyzing these modes of symbolization of cultural or “human” sciences, contrasting them with the modes of constitution of natural sciences, as mentioned above, Cassirer (2000) considers that cultural objects, in addition to having a physical existence, however without being reduced to mere physicality, also have a historical nature and a psychological existence. We will now move on to the author’s considerations about this historicity of the object.

The cultural object has a historicity that cannot be disregarded. But, at the same time, the analysis of this object cannot be reduced to historical investigations in themselves. Cassirer (2000) states that each cultural science develops concepts of form and style to constitute its investigative field and define its object. The concepts of form and style, according to the author, are “neither ‘nomothetic’ nor merely ‘ideographic’” (Cassirer, 2000, p. 58). These concepts are not nomothetic, as they do not aim to establish a universal law, such as the gravitational law, for example. At the same time, the cultural object cannot be reduced to historical considerations (Cassirer, 2000, p. 58).

To illustrate the particularity of the cultural object and the constitution of the concepts of form and style in cultural sciences, Cassirer (2000) first cites linguistics, more specifically Humboldt’s studies. Wilhelm von Humboldt develops the concept of “inner form of language,” through which he was able to group different languages according to their structure. Obviously, each language has its historicity, its historical development. However, the concept of “inner form” “stabilizes” the field of analysis, allowing the researcher to analyze the object based on considerations related to the internal structure of the language.

Another example presented by Cassirer (2000), which is more extensively debated and detailed, comes from the science of art. The author illustrates his theses on form and style based on the studies of Wölfflin, who develops the concepts of linear style and painterly style. The linear style and the painterly style do not exactly affect the “history” of painting since they are present in different trends over time. In effect, these two styles – present not only in painting, but also in other arts such as sculpture and even architecture – concern ways of “seeing” the object, and based on this “vision,” ways of *representing it*. Thus, in the linear style, the artist focuses his gaze on a “more fixed” form of the object, whereas, in the painterly style, there is a way of “seeing” that tends to distinguish forms in transmutation. In Cassirer’s words, painterly and linear styles are “two ways of

apprehending spatial relations that pursue two completely different goals” (Cassirer, 2000, p. 60).

In the examples discussed by Cassirer (2000), our attention is drawn to the emphasis given to the idea of “vision,” in the sense of “apprehension of the world.” First, Humboldt’s concept of inner form of language refers to a way in which languages construct worldviews. The concepts coming from the science of art, linear style, and painterly style are also ways of “seeing.” That is, they are ways from which the artist apprehends his object, framing the perceived spatial relationships. In fact, if we go back to the beginning of this article, in which we address the two general ways of perceiving phenomena – knowledge of the thing *versus* knowledge of the other –, we will see that the idea of “apprehension,” of worldview, and by extension, *representation*, is central to Cassirerian philosophy, basing the concept itself in symbolic form, as a specific way of apprehending the world and symbolizing it.

When presenting these examples, Cassirer (2000) seeks to emphasize that the cultural object results from History, but his analysis does not focus on the mere “telling” of this story, in simple temporal successions. The historicity of the object tends to be condensed into a general “direction” of the gaze.

History, moreover, should not be conceived as historicity, but as a (re)creation, as a new life – a “dialogue” between the context of the analyst, who is immersed in his own time, and the time inscribed in the object –, because culture is alive, as it is the means through which the “I” and the “you” are first constituted (Cassirer, 2000, p. 50).

When dealing with history, Cassirer (2000) states that it is alive, as is culture itself, since the history of the cultural object is not a mere past existence – it is about the understanding and (re)signification of historical meanings inscribed in the object. In his words, monuments that are preserved become significant, “once we begin to see in these monuments symbols not only in which we recognize specific forms of life, but by virtue of which we are able to restore them for ourselves” (Cassirer, 2011, p. 77).

This excerpt “sounds” particularly Bakhtinian to us, reminding us of the idea of “great time” (Bakhtin, 1986),⁴⁹ according to which the meanings, even those of the past, are always renewed. Cassirer emphasizes that monuments of the past are preserved

⁴⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

(writings, paintings, bronze sculptures). But these monuments acquire meaning only when we do not see them in their mere material existence, in their mere “monumentality,” but rather when we see them as symbols and (re)signify them to ourselves.

In the essay *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, Bakhtin (1986)⁵⁰ states that one cannot change the *material* aspect of the past. However, the meaning can be modified. Cassirer (2000), like Bakhtin, emphasizes that the *material aspect* of cultural objects is preserved. However, the moment we consider not the simple matter, but the symbolic meaning, culture is reborn.

Finally, the psychological element that constitutes the cultural object (remembering that this is physical, historical, and psychological, without being reduced to Physics, History, and Psychology – being a great “synthesis” of these three aspects) can be understood, in our reading, as “authorial position.” When dealing with art, Cassirer (2000, p. 84) highlights the creative character of this symbolic form, that is, the creative function by virtue of which the artist distinguishes the essential from the non-essential, the necessary from the accidental. However, we do not find this “essential,” this worldview that was cut out and represented, following the inductive method of natural sciences. Here, we are faced with the intuition of the great artist – the vision of Homer, Michelangelo, Raphael, Dante, Shakespeare, etc. (examples presented by Cassirer, 2000, p. 84) – which created the image of ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, England, and so on.

This artistic intuition, which chooses essential features and selects them, which judges, which represents something, is the result of a “unity of vision” of a time. At this point, Cassirer (2000) distinguishes the way in which the natural sciences construct their object as opposed to the way in which the cultural sciences do this. Both sciences, when constituting their concepts, seek a “unity,” through which the particular is classified by the universal. However, the subordination of the particular to the universal does not occur in the same way. In natural sciences, there is a “unity of being” constituted from the moment in which, starting from the empirical element, the concept surpasses the empirical itself. The object is thus determined by universal laws. In cultural sciences, in turn, an “ideational abstraction” prevails, through which not a strict unity of being is

⁵⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

constituted, but a unity of direction, that is, a certain “unity of vision” of the world. In Cassirer’s words (2000, p. 72): “The particular individuals belong together – not because they are alike or resemble each other but because they cooperate in a common *task*.” The image of the “Renaissance man” is constituted from this “*unity of direction*,” which according to Cassirer (2000) does not correspond to an empirically observable being, but to a certain vision, to a “spirit” of an era.

Cassirer dialogues with his time, with the physicalist vision that prevailed at that time, criticizing physicalism, which seeks to study everything, even cultural objects, based on physical laws. He thus seeks to show the uniqueness of cultural objects and the uniqueness of the sciences that focus on these objects, the “cultural sciences.”

In the next topic, we will present Bakhtin’s vision regarding human sciences.

3 The Specificity of Human Sciences in Bakhtin’s View

In Bakhtin’s earliest writings (Bakhtin, 1986;⁵¹ 1990⁵²), we find the author’s initial reflections on science. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin criticizes not exactly theorization, but the fact that the object of theoretical knowledge seeks to pass itself off as the world as such (Bakhtin, 1999).⁵³

In the essay *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art*, dated from 1924, Bakhtin (1990)⁵⁴ presents a definition of the cognitive domain in the unity of culture. The author considers culture as a concrete and systematic phenomenon and addresses the idea of “value” as something central to define each of the domains of cultural creation (the ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive domains). In this sense, the cognitive domain is understood as a form of appropriation/construction of reality that does not accept ethical evaluation or aesthetic formalization (Bakhtin, 1990).⁵⁵ Unlike the aesthetic domain, which is “benevolent” and “welcoming” in relation to pre-existing

⁵¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵² For reference, see footnote 35.

⁵³ BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vladim Liapunov; edited by Vladim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. 1St. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

⁵⁴ For reference, see footnote 35.

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 35.

values, science constitutes a “closed domain,” which rejects pre-existing evaluation and aesthetic formalization.

Finally, in the essay *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, the Russian thinker (1990)⁵⁶ defines the ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive domains taking “consciousness” in interaction as its central concept. Thus, the aesthetic domain would be characterized by being established from at least two consciousnesses that cannot be on the same evaluative plane, since the author-consciousness occupies an “exotopic” position in relation to the character-consciousness. In the ethical domain, in turn, we have consciousnesses that are on the same evaluative plane. Finally, the cognitive domain is characterized by the “reign” of a single consciousness: “When there is no hero at all, not even in a potential form, then we have to do with an event that is cognitive (treatise, article, lecture)” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 22).⁵⁷

In these three aforementioned initial essays, the author seeks to define the cognitive domain and the activity of the cognizing subject in relation to the cognizable object. It should be noted that Bakhtin’s reflections do not exactly focus on science itself, since his object of study is literature (*The Author and the Character; The Problem of Content*). However, his view of culture as a concrete and systematic totality leads him to analyze the aesthetic object based on the relationships established with the other domains of creation.

In general terms, we can see that in these essays, science is considered as a domain of cultural creation that is “closed” in relation to other domains (in the sense that it does not accept pre-existing values). Science is established based on a “cognitive-cognizable” relation, in which only one consciousness exists (the cognitive). The cognizable object is something – due to its nature as an “object” – unconscious in itself.

In later essays (mainly *From Notes Made in 1970-71; Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences; The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences*), when approaching science, Bakhtin seems to seek what we called in previous work (Kemiatic, 2022) the “libertarian” element. In effect, while defining and analyzing different cultural elements in several of his writings, Bakhtin searches for that which would “free” the existence of the analyzed element. Thus, *polyphony*, for example, would

⁵⁶ For reference, see footnote 35.

⁵⁷ For reference, see footnote 35.

be the element that would free the novel from the reign of the author's conscience. *Laughter*, in turn, would free life from the various authoritarianism that restrict existence. *Human sciences* (as "heteroscience") would finally be the element that would free the object from a "mute" existence.

The last three essays cited (*From Notes Made in 1970-71; Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences; The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences*), although they are unfinished texts, show us this constant search for the libertarian element of culture (of life, art, and science). In fact, it is interesting to note how these three themes – polyphony (the libertarian element of art), laughter (the libertarian element of life) and human sciences (the libertarian element of the cognitive domain) – permeate the texts.

The essay *The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences* was published "in the collection *Estética sloviésnovo tvórtchestva* (Aesthetics of Verbal Creation, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1979),"⁵⁸ according to the translator of the work (from Russian to Portuguese), Paulo Bezerra (Bezerra, 2017, p. 7). In this translation, Bezerra informs us that he abolished the expression "The problem of," which appeared in the title of the 2003 translation. According to Bezerra (2017, p. 7), the essay *From Notes Made in 1970-71* was written at the end of Bakhtin's life and was published "in the collection *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation* (...), with organization and notes by Serguei Botcharov,"⁵⁹ *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, as the translator (Paulo Bezerra) informs us, originated from an essay drafted between the late 1930s and early 1940s.

In the first lines of *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, to characterize human sciences, Bakhtin focuses on two ways of constructing knowledge: knowledge of the thing and knowledge of the individual (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶⁰ The "thing" is the impersonal object, "mere dead thing." Therefore, it approaches the object of science from a positivist perspective. The individual's knowledge, in turn, presupposes "dialogue,

⁵⁸ In Portuguese: "foi publicado 'na coletânea *Estética sloviésnovo tvórtchestva* (Estética da criação verbal, Mocoú, Iskusstvo, 1979)'. "

⁵⁹ In Portuguese: "na coletânea *Estética da criação verbal* (...), com organização e notas de Serguei Botcharov."

⁶⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

interrogation, prayer” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶¹ The individual is not a mere dead thing, but something “alive” – it is a consciousness or conscientious phenomena, something that would therefore not reveal itself in Carnap’s physicalist language, which was criticized by Cassirer (2000, p. 41).

However, the knowledge of the thing and the knowledge of the individual are characterized by Bakhtin as “limits,” that is, as tendencies of knowledge: “The dead thing does not exist in the limit, it is an abstract (conventional) element; to some extent, any totality (nature and all its manifestations related to totality) is personal” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶² Cassirer also conceives the knowledge of the thing and the knowledge of the other as *tendencies*, as directions of knowledge. To both authors (Bakhtin and Cassirer), there is no unilaterality in the apprehension of the real.

Bakhtin emphasizes that in essence all experience “is personal” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶³ The mere dead thing results from a work of abstraction that tends to the limit. Cassirer, in turn, considers the knowledge of the other, which is based on the phenomenon of expression, as a primary stratum of knowledge. The knowledge of the thing results in a progressive work of the spirit in the establishment of increasingly abstract relationships. The expressive phenomenon, as we discussed previously, never disappears completely.

To Cassirer (2000), as mentioned in the previous topic, human sciences result from a synthesis between the knowledge of the thing and the knowledge of the other; their object is man in his cultural manifestations. Unlike natural sciences, in which a *unity of being* prevails in the object (identity, in the limit: $a = a$), in human sciences, the object is characterized by a *unity of direction*, that is, the object is a synthesis of a certain way of apprehending the world; it results from a “spirit” of a time.

Still in the essay *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, Bakhtin states that “The object of human sciences is the *expressive* and *speaking* being. This being never coincides with itself and is therefore inexhaustible in its sense and meaning” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶⁴ Therefore, the object of these sciences, not presupposing coincidence with itself ($a = a$), distances itself from the object of natural sciences. However, more than the result of a “spirit of a time,” the object of human sciences has the peculiarity of “being” a

⁶¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶² For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶³ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

consciousness, not being a “mere dead thing,” a mere “mute” thing. Being a consciousness, this object establishes the need for dialogue: “the being of expression is bilateral: it only takes place in the interaction of two consciousnesses (that of the self and that of the other)” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶⁵

The object of human sciences is, a priori, a phenomenon of consciousness because cultural products (mainly literary works, Bakhtin’s object of study) result from the work of assimilating the voice of the other. This voice, assimilated, “forgotten” (in its first origin), establishes a “dialogizing” background. The author deals with the constitution of the authorial voice based on the assimilation of the other’s words. This word of the other constitutes the dialogizing background of the work, because once assimilated, it is “heard” as the voice of a time, of the people, of “nature,” the “voice of God” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁶⁶

Bakhtin uses the metaphor of music, when he states that “The work also includes its necessary extratextual context. The work, as it were, is enveloped in the music of the intonational-evaluative context in which it is understood and evaluated” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 166).⁶⁷ This extratextual context, resulting from the other’s word that was assimilated, “vibrates,” resonates, in the work. Therefore, it is up to the analyst to listen to the notes that resonate in the work. This act of “listening” means that the analysis does not reduce the object to a “mere dead thing,” but, on the contrary, personifies this object. Personifying is, therefore, understanding the gradual process of assimilating the voice of the other.

However, just as I can personify my object, I can also reify it. In *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, Bakhtin (1986)⁶⁸ states that reification leads to the disappearance of meaning. Furthermore, he states that the analyst reifies the work when he seeks biographical, sociological, vulgar, and causal explanations, as well as when he seeks “depersonalized historicity (“a history without names”)” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 162).⁶⁹ Let us therefore observe that it is not exactly the object itself that is a “thing” or something “personalized.” In principle, the object of exact and natural sciences is the thing itself.

⁶⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

But even literary work, a typical object of human sciences, can be reified depending on the attitude of the analyst.

In short, “personifying” is more than “seeing life” in things – it is conceiving the other as consciousness in interaction, considering that the material environment of the object is always the same, but the meaning changes. Therefore, the analyst must make the material environment “start talking” (Bakhtin, 1986).⁷⁰

Bakhtin admits that the introduction of “mathematical methods” and other methods (which reify the object) is “an irreversible process” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 145),⁷¹ but he proposes that specific methods be developed, such as what he calls “axiological approach” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 145, author’s highlight):⁷² “In the process of dialogic communication, the object is transformed into the subject (the other’s *I*.” Thus, he proposes a “different science” (heteroscience)⁷³ (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 161).⁷⁴ Heteroscience would deal with the interpretation of the meanings – conceiving that the meaning, unlike the material environment, is something very “mobile,” because it is always renewed. In his words: “The interpretation of symbolic structures is forced into an infinity of symbolic contextual meanings and therefore it cannot be scientific in the way precise sciences are scientific” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 160).⁷⁵

Let us observe that the “symbolic structure” that Bakhtin refers to is the meaning, that which is always renewed, which always has a “festive return.” Human sciences work with symbols, since they study not the material environment in its mere physicality, but the “festive” renewal, the reconfiguration of the meanings. To Cassirer, human sciences work with objects that have a symbolic value, conceiving this expression (*symbolic value*) in the sense of something “extra” that emerges and transcends materiality. Bakhtin’s symbolic, in turn, is meaning in a relationship between the given and the new; what remains and what changes.

⁷⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷² For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷³ In the translation of the essay *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences* from Russian to Portuguese done by Paulo Bezerra (see references: Bakhtin, 2017a), we find the word “heteroscience” (heterociência), used to describe the non-normative procedure of human sciences. The Russian to English translation of this same essay, by Vern W. McGee and edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, uses the expression “different science.” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 161).

⁷⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

The Russian author limits the symbolic character to the field of “meaning”: symbolic is that which has meaning, which transcends materiality, which is renewed by being inscribed in history. Thus, strictly speaking, science is insufficient to study meaning; therefore, it is necessary to establish *heteroscience*.

We consider interesting this proposition of heteroscience made by the author. We agree with Faraco (2009), in the sense that Bakhtin defends the need to create another science but he does not actually “create” this science. Faraco (2009) refers to Bakhtin’s propositions for the study of utterance. In the book *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*,⁷⁶ and in the essay *The Problem of Speech Genres*,⁷⁷ Bakhtin proposes the creation of “metalinguistics.” As stated by Faraco (2009), Bakhtin, assuming the legitimacy of Linguistics in the study of the sentence, of the synchronic grammatical system, proposes another science, “metalinguistics” or translanguistics to study utterance. Similarly, we find the Russian author formulating, in general terms, the proposition of a “heteroscience” in his unfinished essays, whose objective would be to study the very “plastic” and elusive aspect of the meaning of the works. Thus, the author does not deny the legitimacy of “traditional” science – it is necessary, and its methods are validated. However, the text, as an object of human sciences (and, above all, literary text), has certain particularities that justify the creation of another science, a heteroscience. This science would not conceive the object as a “thing” in itself but would see the meanings that vibrate in the text, which transforms it into a consciousness for the researcher – and thus “frees” the object from a mute existence. Heteroscience would therefore be the “libertarian” element (alongside laughter and polyphony) that we referred to previously.

Finally, we must highlight that to Bakhtin human sciences are not homogeneous, they are the sciences “about man in his specific nature.” Human sciences do not study the “voiceless thing or natural phenomenon” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 107).⁷⁸ but, when constituted, they “grasp various bits of nature” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 113).⁷⁹ In the essay *The Problem of*

⁷⁶ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. 8th printing. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

⁷⁷ BAKHTIN, M. *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In: *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 60-102.

⁷⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences, Bakhtin (1986)⁸⁰ states that the text is the primary data of the disciplines labeled as “human sciences,” and he defines “text,” in a broad sense, as “any coherent complex of signs” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 103).⁸¹ Bakhtin argues that the text is established at two poles. At the first pole, we have the sign system that constitutes the text (considering that the text can be verbal, pictorial, “musical,” that is, be made up of different sign), “everything repeatable and reproducible” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 105).⁸² At the second pole, we have the text as a statement, that is, the text as something singular, unrepeatable. The author (Bakhtin, 1986)⁸³ affirms that, between these two poles – the sign system and the statement –, the different humanistic disciplines are arranged. The disciplines that constitute human sciences, in his words: “they wander in various directions, grasp various bits of nature, social life, states of mind, and history, and combine them – sometimes with causal, sometimes with semantic, ties – and intermix statements with evaluations” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 113).⁸⁴

In Bakhtin’s view, human sciences, although heterogeneous, have in common the fact that their object is necessarily “semiotic data,” that is, a text. He states, therefore, that when we study man, “we search for and find signs everywhere” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 114).⁸⁵ The general difference between human sciences and natural sciences would reside in this semiotic character of the object. In the essay *The Text in Linguistics, Philology and Other Human Sciences*, the author states: “If there is no language behind the text, it is not a text, but a natural (not signifying) phenomenon” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 105).⁸⁶

At this point, we find a divergence between Bakhtin’s thought and Cassirer’s thought. To this last author (Cassirer), all science necessarily has a symbolic character, it is a “signifying phenomenon” (to appropriate the expression used by Bakhtin). In the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, when building his theses on symbolic forms as different modes of objectification, Cassirer states that physical and mathematical science were the first to be aware of the symbolic character of their objects and instruments. In the essay *Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture*, he (Cassirer, 1979)

⁸⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸² For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸³ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

argues that the development of natural science in the 20th century shows that this form of knowledge works with symbolic data, since basic concepts of physics, such as the concept of “matter,” do not remain uniform.

To Cassirer, science (as well as all other symbolic forms) is necessarily constituted from a system of signs and cannot be conceived outside this “semiotic” expression. Bakhtin, in turn, as he states at different moments in the essay *The Problem of text...*, conceives that only the human sciences have a “semiotic” object. The specificity of each science labeled as “humanistic” would reside in the ways in which it arranges its object along the two poles of the text; how the humanistic sciences “cut out” reality (that is, whether they tend their object more towards the pole of mere semiotic expression or towards the pole of the statement).

However, we highlight that the “big question” for Bakhtin is not simply analyzing the text as “semiotic data,” as a “system of signs”: the question that the author is concerned with is the study of the text as a statement, as an unrepeatable, singular element, in which an author expresses himself and which can only be understood in the chain of texts, that is, in interaction. Thus, the Russian philosopher emphasizes: “The spirit (both one’s own and another’s) is not given as a thing (the direct object of the natural sciences); it can only be present through signification, through realization in texts, both for itself and for others” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 106).⁸⁷ He also highlights that the second pole of the text is “inseparably linked with the aspect of authorship” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 106),⁸⁸ therefore being the expression of a singular worldview with which the researcher enters dialogue.

Final Considerations

This article set out to compare Cassirer’s theories about human sciences (or “cultural sciences”) with Bakhtin’s reflections on these same sciences. Throughout this research, we point out similarities and differences in the discussions presented by the two authors.

⁸⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

A clear similarity stands out in the ways in which the authors (Cassirer and Bakhtin) approach the object of human sciences as opposed to the object of natural sciences, based on the idea of “personification” and “reification” (Bakhtin) and knowledge of the “other” (or of you/thou) and knowledge of “it” (Cassirer, 2000). We believe that the source of this theorization would not reside, however, in a probable influence of Cassirerian ideas on Bakhtin’s writings, but in the reading that both authors would have made of the works of Scheler, Dilthey and Rickert. In fact, Scheler is reviewed at length in volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (see Chapter II. The basic phenomenon of expression as a basic factor of perceptual consciousness), with his “psychological idealism” criticized by Cassirer. At times, Bakhtin also cites Scheler in his unfinished essays (*Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences; From Notes Made in 1970-71*). Azevedo Júnior (2022) points out that before the publication of Cassirer’s (2000) work on the logic of cultural sciences, we already had reference texts on the issue of the methodological identity of these sciences. Dilthey and Rickert are reference authors for Cassirer. The Baden school, to which Heinrich Rickert is affiliated, provided valuable discussions on the issue. These same philosophers (Dilthey, Rickert) are also cited in Bakhtin’s unfinished essays. Therefore, the approximations that can be drawn between Cassirer’s and Bakhtin’s considerations about human sciences would result from several common readings and the “convergence” of purposes that Lofts (2016)⁸⁹ talks about in his article.

Finally, we highlight the dialogue from which Cassirer and Bakhtin construct their ideas. When formulating his theses about the specificity of the sciences of the spirit, Cassirer debates the physicalism that prevails at the time of his production. Bakhtin, in turn, having literature as his main object of analysis, debates with Formalism, with a strong positivist influence, which proposes the study of the literary object based on postulates from Linguistics.

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⁸⁹ For reference, see footnote 1.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review II

The article presents appropriate methodology, updated bibliographic references and relevant research content. The way in which the proposal on harmony between Cassirer and Bakhtin is explored and described is a significant contribution to the reading of the Russian author's texts. For all these reasons, my opinion is in favor of publication. I just point out the need to correct some words, which I listed elsewhere. APPROVED

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