

# SYMBOLIC FORM AND GESTALT – A CREATIVE TENSION

## Ernst Cassirer's Contribution to a 'Matrix of Mental Formation'

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### In Search for the Structure of Mental Existence

In 1894 philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (Dilthey 1924/1894) initiated a public debate when he accused the empirical research strategies of Psychology (and Psychiatry) of failing to grasp the structural content of mental existence. What was felt as blame in those days has grown to a matter of scandal as Dilthey's allegations still properly describe the state of clinical psychiatry and psychopathological approach - more than a hundred years later. In the early 20th century Germany saw numerous efforts towards philosophically orientated research into the structure of the conscious mind.

Amongst the prominent philosophies influencing this research were Husserl's phenomenology of "logical experiences" (Husserl 1984/1901) and Natorp's quest for a "logos of psyche", (Natorp 1965/1912) by which the formation of mind and operational structures of thought and reflection should be determined. Arthur Kronfeld was one of the few psychiatrists to face this demand, and it was upon him to promote a radical change in clinical practice. In 1920 he made the suggestion to trace back mental performance to ontologically irreducible qualities to secure the logic and the theory of psychiatry. Ernst Cassirer's project to analyse "the different basic forms of world understanding" and to establish "a structure of mental formation" (Formenlehre des Geistes) can well be seen as part of this more general debate. Nonetheless, Cassirer altered and widened this approach by stating that the ongoing change of mental frame - which is a unique quality of mankind, as well as his flexibility and ability to create future and realms of possibility – can only emerge from a broader knowledge about relational order. Those skills are grounded in man's ability to expand mental terms and settings of cognition beyond the borders of language to even more abstract spheres, thus claiming that a system of "invariants of experience" (Invariantensystem der Erfahrung) is an integral trait of human cognition (Pluemacher/Sandkuehler 2003). With regards to Cassirer - the key to understanding the conscious mind (and thus psychopathology) lies in the persistent change from terms of "substance" to terms of "function" and the different symbolic levels which

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are created by their alternating relational order. It is this oscillation and living tension between personal intentionality and the body of (public/natural) resonance on different levels which leads to a whole 'matrix' of paradigms: rotating spheres of sense-making and world-understanding. These are the basics of consciousness and 'self evidence' - which is not just a 'given' but an artificial construct of culture which breaks down in mental crisis. It will have to be such a structural approach and abstract understanding to open a route to a "new psychopathology" and to renovate the fundamentals of psychotherapy. This approach is set to mobilize a healing potential and sources of 'gestaltung' from both correspondents within their individual and group-related patterns and deliberately includes the focus on and treatment of the most severe forms of mental illness, classified today as schizophrenia, psychosis and personality disorder.

It was the Neurologist, Kurt Goldstein, who stated that the 'process of healing' will never lead to the return to the original state of mind and that it is the professional's task to help the client to achieve a radically new organisation, a new equilibrium, to build his world anew, after the breakdown of old forms of 'Gestaltung'.

In 1999, at the Graz Conference, our colleague, Gerhard Stemberger, asked the question, "Is there a Gestalt -theoretical psychotherapy? Is there a Gestalt-theoretical psychopathology?" I would answer "no" to both of those questions. But Stemberger's approach aims towards a much more ambitious project: What can we do to improve the importance of gestalt-theoretical aspects in psychopathology? How can our own understanding of 'Gestalt' be developed, in that its concept is brought to its optimal use? What can be done to reform the old classification systems ICD-10 and DSM-IV? How can we work towards a theory of 'invariants of experience', those constellations of conditions which have to be extracted from the real life process? And how can we build a theory of psychopathology on the foundations of such a new general system of dynamic laws of existence?

I very much agree with these questions concerning the role of Gestalt -theory in psychotherapy; they are important and I do feel there is a real challenge waiting for us: the Gestalt- movement is far away from having exhausted its possibilities in psychopathological discussion. It still has the substance to emerge as one of the primary agents when it comes to the unsolved task of setting up an 'Ontology' of human consciousness. Only a general ontology can revolutionize our approach to people with mental illness and only a radical change will enable us to implement real changes when it comes to the treatment of the most severe forms of mental illness.

### **Ernst Cassirer's Approach**

I have worked myself through numerous theories of psychopathology but in the end it was two books by the philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, which have shown the most remarkable congruence with my clinical experience in psychiatry. The first one was his study: "Substance and Function" from 1910, which deconstructs the 'obviousness of human self evidence' down to the isolated fragments of its complex inner relationships, and the second one was Cassirer's main oeuvre, "Philosophy of Symbolic

Forms" which attracted me with some magic fascination which I could only explain sometime later. What Cassirer describes as an expression of 'symbolic formation', symbolic creation and the additional gain of free intentionality within a room of resonance - all of our human developments through magical, mythical, religious, body-related, political, scientific and art related cultural forms - all of this is lost again in mental crisis. In a psychiatric crisis this happens in the reverse order, condensed to a few weeks or days, and in this short period of time, the individual seems to lose what civilisation has gained over centuries and millennia. It is now the loss of self-understanding, the break-up of world-making, the dissolution of our rooms of resonance, the break-down of perspective and potential, the loss of abstraction, integration, communication and of our capabilities to set boundaries - with space- and time- and body-experience just vanishing in an abyss. This is essentially a 'mental involution', instead of evolution, in which we are forced back to old inner forgotten bindings, to earlier connections of our life. It is a loss of our 'matrix of consciousness' and with such chaos dominating the scene, there is a return of visions, acoustical and optical hallucinations.

Ernst Cassirer, as a philosopher, always had an interest in psychology and psychopathology, but his ideas were far removed from discussions of Kraepelin, Bleuler, Jaspers or Heidegger. Although famous for his universal knowledge, Cassirer remained totally uninfluenced by Freud and Jung. His thinking is based on Leibniz, Kant and Husserl, and on the concepts of mathematical and geometrical theories, such as those of Bernhard Riemann and Felix Klein. There was a certain neurological influence via his studies of Jackson, Marie and Head, and the family connection to Richard Cassirer, a well-known neuropathologist of the early last century. Above all, it was his friendship and close clinical co-operation with his nephew, Kurt Goldstein, which led to some years of close clinical co-operation during the 'Weimar Republic'. Goldstein was already a famous neurotraumatologist during World War I, and his enormous knowledge about brain damage and aphasia led to his internationally renowned theoretical work on aphasia (together with Ademar Gelb). Cassirer profited from Goldstein's work and vice versa. Goldstein took on, more or less entirely, Cassirer's theory of symbolic formation and applied it to his clinical experience. It is via Goldstein's influence and publications that the thinking of Cassirer was accepted by Bohr and Benjamin. It was also Kurt Levin, an early scholar of Ernst Cassirer whose lifelong clinical work remained influenced by this philosopher. There were strong influences between Cassirer and Gestalt-theory from its early years and Cassirer critically commented on the works of Ehrenfels, Meinong and Koehler. It actually was Koehler's thorough research on animal behaviour which made a big impression on Cassirer and, in his later years, led him to soften his rigid thesis of a developmental gap between highly sophisticated animal skills and early cultural forms. He also read Koffka and Wertheimer but beyond his practical co-operation with Goldstein an intense theoretical exchange did not happen. This might have been expected given the strong structural relationship between Cassirer's theory of Symbolic Form and the Gestalt-theoretical approach in mind. Nonetheless, at the end of the 1920's there was quite a broad building-up of theory and a growing field of discussion concerning new structural theories between philosophers, psy-

chologists and psychiatrists, all of them focusing on a new approach to the structure of consciousness beyond classical psychopathology and psychoanalysis. All of these attempts were brought to a brutal halt by German fascism. Relentlessly, all of the researchers involved in this discourse were driven into exile, and some of them were even killed.

It was the loss of philosophical background, the enforced break-up of personal and working-relationships, the second World War itself and, thereafter, the psychiatric pragmatism dominated by pharmacology mixed with a rigorous conservatism with its philosophical focus on Heidegger, that pushed the once powerful ideas of Gestalt and Symbolic Formation out of practice. It was also the main figures of Gestalt-theory itself, who lost the connection to its theoretical foundations and allowed themselves to be drawn into other fields of discussion. A major blow was Cassirer's early death in 1945. His connections to Goldstein and Levine had already been disrupted some years earlier but now, without Cassirer's backup, a radical approach to progress beyond clinical experience into a field of virtual experience was lost. It is emerging only today, from research into the papers of those days, that the clinical skills of Goldstein and Levin were in urgent need of a constant philosophical influence, to build their theories to even more abstract levels, to come to new results and find a new approach to psychopathology, using a system of 'invariants' able to explain earlier levels of world-making from their inner self-understanding.

In reality Levine's structural field theories were forced back to more practical levels to at least gain some acceptance within a totally pragmatic American environment, and Goldstein was even more disappointed when his progressive ideas towards a new psychopathology, which he laid down in his Harvard lectures, were received with a humiliating disapproval by the public who were unwilling and perhaps unable to grasp the revolutionary contention of his concept.

### **Substance and Function**

Empirical research in the field of mental illness has confirmed over the years what professionals are experiencing in daily practice: biological and environmental factors are not the sole contributors to mental disease. Instead, whenever those are involved, their synchronic impact leads to a level of deterioration far beyond their combined added contributions. These unexpected results force a clinical view away from the contributing correspondents to the means and mechanisms linking both subject and milieu to each other.

It is this symbolic link between man and his milieu which is the focus of Cassirer's early work, 'Substance and Function'. Cassirer had, while studying mathematical theory, detected that concrete and substance-orientated terms in mathematical thinking and geometry were, over the centuries, systematically replaced by functional relations and, later, by wholly abstract terms of understanding. He discovered that each of those "views" is only one form of world-making and is related to a whole series of levels of consciousness – all of them carrying in themselves the measure of their own inner reality. Even more enlightening to him were develop-

ments in geometry from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Euclidian geometry which, for centuries, was seen as the natural and final stage of the discipline (as its reality was proven day by day) found itself replaced by a whole group of virtual and previously unimaginable spheres: the Riemann-Geometries. What was most surprising about those new "geometries" was that they all had emerged as complementary yet independent worlds - all of them exist side by side and, following mathematical understanding, none of them can be replaced by the other nor be absorbed or fully integrated in their structures.

What makes these new "realms" of intertwined spheres valuable beyond their actual existence is that their underlying patterns can be used to solve complicated mathematical problems in the real world. Those tasks, for example, Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism or Einstein's theory of relativity, would have remained unresolved unless geometrical thoughts were allowed to escape from being linked to concrete objects and locations. In this system Euclidean reality still has its value but only as one level of geometrical world-making, now being one element within a whole group of different worlds of experience.

Cassirer tried to apply these ideas of constant change in mental perspectives to cultural development. It is here that Cassirer's approach enforces the emigration out of the concrete field of sensual understanding to a complex world of relations and structures: an organised collection of parallel complex realities. A necessary step to understanding Gestalt, which, until today, is not shared by many of its practitioners and theoreticians. Human consciousness - following Cassirer - is neither constant nor chaotic in its development, but it emerges alongside different symbolically-formed levels of world-understanding. Cassirer relocates the focus of psychopathological observation away from the brain to the inner tension between individual and group, to the metamorphosis of symbolic forms that we now call 'civilisation'.

Cassirer never finalised his idea of proposing a system of symbolic formation or what I would call the 'Matrix': a system of invariants of experience. Nonetheless, he has worked out its foundations, and laid out all the theoretical and axiomatic conditions of its fluctuating structure. Until today, Cassirer's theoretical approach to psychopathology has been greatly misunderstood, often confused with the concepts of contemporary philosophers, symbolists and Gestalt therapists, and as a result, left behind in the mainstream debate of psychiatry. It is crucial to understand that Cassirer's approach to symbolic formation is not based on the elementary allocation of a sphere of subjective fictional signs or terms to the perception of given objects in the surrounding environment. Instead, his concept requires the allocation of rules and structures that can be transferred from each of both spheres into the other. This means that the structure of one of both correspondents is not perceived as a given but only created in the process of 'Gestaltung' itself. Thus emerging as a complementary complexity of underlying patterns of both sides. Cassirer's concept, and this is the major difference compared to Gestalt theory - and a prerequisite to understanding the Matrix of Mental Formation -, can be extended to theoretical or virtual spheres which are no longer bound to an empirical construct or perception.

Reapplying this concept to psychology and psychiatry would require a paradigm shift, comparable to what the Riemann-turn has been to traditional geometry. At

this point, I have to contradict the declarations of quite a few, mainly German, Gestalt organisations or theoreticians: it is just not (!) the primal importance of the phenomena; it is not (!) the presence of Gestalt as directly given phenomenon of nature which allows a full understanding of its formation. On the contrary, it is the escape from those concrete visual spheres into a virtual realm of relations and structures which allows - what the Greek word "symbolein" actually means: the creation of a wholeness, a symbolic form, deriving from complementary correspondents - like man and milieu.

Regarding underlying patterns of the contributing correspondents that facilitate this process, it is this abstract phenomenon of *praegnanz* that makes Gestalt possible and not the concrete superficial characteristics of both actors, even though it is their fascinating uniqueness which catches the observers' eye at the first glance.

Cassirer thought of extracting underlying patterns from cultural development in an attempt to find a 'universal system of symbolisation'. He based his assumptions on the research of the biologist, J. Van Uexkuell. His findings were that man shares his biological 'circle of functioning' with all animals, using the receptor and effector system which keeps us adapted to a certain part of our environment. Cassirer altered this concept, adding that only in man we do find a third link, which he calls the 'symbolic system' - an intermediary world or 'Zwischenreich'. It does not exist from early childhood or as a biological fact but instead has to be drawn up in constant interaction between the previously autoregulative self and his or her field of resonance in group and environment. This 'symbolic system' emerges like a protective separating selective and connective curtain between individual and reality. Cassirer stated that the endless variety of human activities can be traced, linked back and reduced to a very limited number of what he calls 'Bewegungsformen' (ie, underlying patterns) which are comparable to the very few elements which create the never-ending multitude of mathematical and chemical worlds, languages and music. Those patterns which are the mutual correspondents of symbolic formation are not a given but have to be found and extracted by man in several steps:

1. by applying meaning to parts of his environment and by doing so to own properties.
2. by intensifying these attractors of importance and separating them from the background into which they are built.
3. by directing this meaningfulness towards a connection, thus carving a complementary complexity from the corresponding side.
4. by finally using the emerging 'symbolic form' (Ganzheit) as a mental tool, independent from its first concrete usage.

Applying these ideas to 'Gestalt' means that 'Gestaltung', i.e. the living process is what Cassirer calls 'symbolic formation': a short-lived synthesis of complementary correspondents which, in itself, emerges as suspension-figure, comparable to a couple performing a tango - a wholeness for the short period of time while both correspondents are in action. 'Gestalt', or: 'symbolic form' is at the same time a sensory form, which, as a lifeless pattern continues to exist until it is taken up again to facilitate the re-enacting of a new Gestaltbildung.

The 'figure versus background' idea of Gestalt-theory only makes sense if this describes the carving of patterns out of the background of individual or group before both those partners come together in the symbolic formation of *Gestaltbildung*. Hence 'figure versus background' has to be the phase of preparation to finally allow the making of 'Ganzheit', i.e. *Gestaltbildung* only thereafter.

### **Abstract versus Concrete Behaviour**

Both Cassirer and Goldstein can be seen as supporters of a philosophical school called 'neutral monism'. 'Impulse and form' in neutral monism are not regarded as conflicting incompatible entities but as an ever-changing relationship of both, thus emerging in different qualities on a continuous level of existence. Wholeness and truth form a parallel plurality - a manifoldness created out of the full complexity of its different components. It is this what Leibniz means when describing his concept of 'harmony'.

Goldstein adapted Cassirer's view that there is no hierarchy within those different levels of world-making. This provided him with a theoretical background for what had been a puzzling experience by observing his brain-injured patients - mainly soldiers from World War I - but what he now could build into a theory of 'abstract versus concrete behaviour': the way brain-damaged patients try to express themselves verbally is neither disordered nor chaotic, as a superficial assessment might suggest. Instead, it is a focused, viable and interactive effort in establishing a new Gestalt, a new equilibrium of correspondence with their environment. Having lost the more abstract tools of world-making, they now link themselves back to the more concrete and sensory ones. In doing so, the patient changes from using elaborated symbols to a more basic form of expression. This means they change from creating a harmony of complementary patterns which can be used as a tool in different situations, to linking their aspects of experiences directly to the concrete field of immediate sensuality. By doing so, they lose their capacity for symbolic usage in future contacts in exchange for a basic ability to at least manage the main aspects of their immediate surroundings right now.

Goldstein had observed this breakdown of abstract behaviour in both brain trauma and schizophrenia. There clearly are different interacting entities in each condition but the loss of most symbolic levels of world-making has traumatic consequences in either case. Thought and language now function on a more basic level and are no longer compatible with their environment. This 'self-healing attempt' to find a new equilibrium of existence is often bound to fail as the majority of the surrounding group - considering themselves as 'normal' - are not ready to downgrade their level of understanding to that of the vulnerable patients.

Nonetheless, this model of adapted 'functioning' - compared to the traditional model of 'local damage' - allows one to look at the pathological process as of a well-understood attempt of mental re-organisation and opens the possibility of reconstructing a new level of symbolic enacting. This led Goldstein to his statement, that 'the unique value of pathology lies in illuminating the nature of health', and that its

symptoms thus are 'lawful variation of the normal life process', even if this involves a shrinkage or revision of self and world until an equilibrium of a radical new sort can be achieved. Symptoms are not isolated expressions of local damage but attempted solutions of healing. The task of the physician therefore is to help to achieve this new equilibrium and 'not force the patient trying to do the old things in the old way'.

Ernst Cassirer has, in his time, tried to encourage psychologists and psychiatrists to widen their clinical view beyond the concrete cases of clinical experience towards a more general theory of pathology. But his brilliant writing about 'pathology of symbolic form' has, until today, not been taken up by the psychiatric profession and has not been used to transform clinical views and clinical practice. Cassirer demands a radical progress from the body/spirit dichotomy to a moving system of inner changeability between substance and function - the only way of thinking which allows to symbolically link biological and social life via patterns of their inner structure. This is a completely novel approach which even left a modern structuralist from the 1920s - psychiatrist Arthur Kronfeld - unable to grasp Cassirer's radical step beyond the realm of clinical experience. It was only in the 1960s that elements of Cassirer's approach were taken up, mainly by French thinkers as von Ey, Ricoeur, Lacan, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty and Bordieu. In Germany there were influences on Conrad and Leuner. It is mainly Leuner's work about artificial psychosis which proves the existence of symbolically linked levels of world-understanding. Their breakdown is the basic condition to every form of psychotic illness, even among those healthy volunteers who only by taking a hallucinogenic drug were made to experience the step-by-step deconstruction of their world-making.

It is their 'loss of abstract behaviour' that causes them to end up in a pre-psychotic or psychotic state and forces them to reconnect to the sensual concreteness of their immediate world of natural experience. Typical psychotic signs (i.e. first or second rank symptoms in the Schneiderian sense) only emerge thereafter and after the reactivation of older systems of symbolic function have failed. In most cases, further protective layers like personal, transpersonal or cosmic visions, archetypal experiences and acoustic hallucinations finally prove unfit to slow down the full impact of the toxic influence and to prevent the deterioration into full psychosis.

The tools of symbolic formation have to remain inactivated over a considerable period of time, before the subject gets really isolated and disconnected from the proof of reality. If this happens, the attraction and fascination of inner worlds quite easily manages to absorb the subject's mental entities. The sudden drive and 'assertiveness', experienced by patients under those circumstances is, nonetheless, not a conscious act of personal will but the unreflected non-symbolic reconnection to the imperative auto-regulative capacity of the instincts. This mental state has a very seductive character, as it goes along with a reunification of subject qualities with grandiose and cosmic worlds of experience. Only after personal energy has been completely used up in these inner worlds does the final experience of being overwhelmed or annihilated tends to appear. It is very difficult and, at times, impossible for the isolated individual to escape this 'rollercoaster' of heaven and hell, and most of the time, to regain a level of independence requires the powerful and structured



magical influence of an organised group. It needs a field of projection, a 'room of resonance' and a joint 'Gestalt' to reconnect these mental energies (and the person who produces them). Only a rare setting of acceptance, care and respect can transform powerful fantasies back to a symbolic creation which subsequently provides the client with his individual tools to re-enter the field of possibility and future. This brings us back to the enormous impact of symbolic formation and the vital need of a structured room of resonance. Both are powerful healing potencies which, until today, remain scarcely used in the field of therapy.

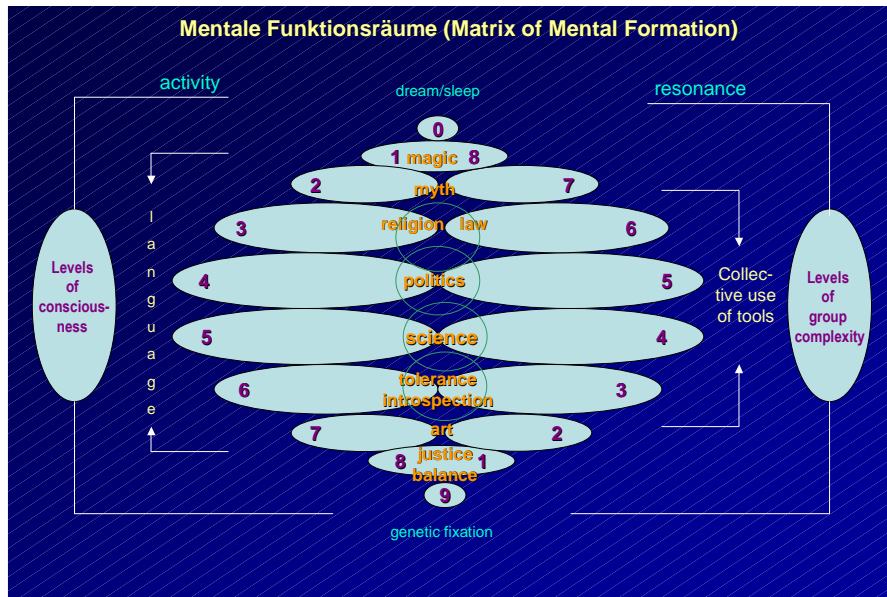
### **A 'Matrix of Mental Formation'**

I would like to show you a simple graph (see Graph I) of how such a Matrix of Mental Formation can be understood. The main aspect is the ongoing cultural exchange between the human being (here on the left) and its natural and cultural milieu (on the right), and the different cultural forms on the different levels of symbolic formation (middle). Without this living interaction, this rapid repetitive proof of reality, human reaction would be reduced to the genetically transmitted patterns of behaviour or fixed cultural forms provided by the group. You can see in the graph that symbolic formation – the third element in the middle – does not exist from the beginning. Instead, it only emerges out of the original condition of universality (0/9), transitional symbiosis (1/8) and in- and ex-corporation (2/7). It takes further steps of symbolic formation and the setting up of a mental membrane to finally develop those contradictory entities, which in adult life, we describe as subject and object (3/6, 4/5, 5/4, 6/3). On the side of the subject, its contribution to the first level of 'Gestaltung' is repetition and fascination. On the next level, there is intensification and typifying. On the third level, there is separation and allocation and, on the fourth level, unco-operation and body activity. On the fifth level, there is, finally, structural thinking. This means 'abstract thinking' which finds itself opposed to a world of objects - which is the publicly agreed way in most industrialized countries to experience the world. You will see that on the different subjective levels, there is an ongoing emancipation, a setting-free of previous bindings (and it is this level of newly-won freedom of possibility or choice that gets lost in the mental crisis). You can see as well that the patterns, which have been extracted by both their correspondents out of their background, always merge as a complementary complexity and that the active part achieves to carve a complementary setting out of his/her correspondent. This explains the metamorphosis of world-making, the change of world-understanding, and the incompatibility between those different paradigms we agree upon with others (see Graph II).

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<b>AUTOREGULATION</b>		<b>INDIVID. PATTERN</b>	<b>SYMB. FORMATION</b>	<b>GROUP PATTERN</b>		<b>AUTOREGULATION</b>
Vision / Dream	0		09		9	Tradition
Compulsion	1	Impulse	1/8	Acceptance	8	Ritus
Dependence	2	Change	2/7	Respect	7	Language
Will	3	Reflection	306	Space	6	Fundamentalism
Imagination	4	Body Awareness	405	Authority	5	Nationalism Racism
Psychosomatics	5	Structure	504	Object	4	Materialism
Isolation	6	Pattern	603	Integration	3	Exclusion
Manipulation	7	Versatility	7/2	Tension	2	Masshysteria
Power	8	Knowledge	8/1	Energy	1	War
Genetic Fixation	9		90		0	Anomie

*Graph II*

The process of becoming an individual is a long one. On the personal side, it requires a long process of training into abstract behaviour which allows us, with that newly-gained complexity, to enforce a deconstruction in our corresponding milieu. Only this allows the continuous creation of new levels of world-making, but it also proves that a mature and personal intentionality is a very late and very abstract level of existence - and comes at a price. This is the loss of contact to our early forms of natural understanding and to our early magical, mythical and religious forms of self-evidence. Cassirer's opinion is that gaining back those sensory and concrete aspects of our lives, which seem to have got lost during our transformation into a state of mature consciousness, is not to be achieved by just going back or regressing to those lost realms of previous experience. From his point of view, it can only be achieved by radically moving further on, from our present structural level of symbolisation and consciousness, towards a newly built integrative virtual sphere. A deductive procedure that entails abandoning final thoughts of organic property or mere localisation will now be replaced by ideas of mere function and changeable relatedness. Only this building up of abstract patterns - in a comparable way to the building up of mathematical theories from differential to integral, infinitesimal.....allows us to proceed to new virtual concepts of symbolisation. It is these new levels which then provide the potential to free up, reactivate and integrate the sensual and sensory lost aspects of our early existence. Only this will allow us to initiate the process of integration, recreation and self-control.

Each of these levels of the Matrix have a different incomparable quality to the previous one. All of them are a world of their own making and none of them can be absorbed or replaced by one of the others. Each of them has its own cultural production and specific form of creation which emerges as magic, myth, language, religion, politics, science, integration, creativity and self-control. They all are universal forms of existence beyond racial or regional differences. Nonetheless, it is a tragic fact that, due to their inner consistency, all of these 'paradigms' lead to a bitter struggle to be accepted as the only way of existence and truth and to eradicate the others. It takes quite a number of unwilling changes through different steps of this mental formation to give in to the experience that different ways of world-building are not contradictory as such; moreover their variety increases flexibility and creativity, and a newly-gained capacity of changing the frame of understanding even increases our mental stability and does not undermine it.

Our consciousness is the brain's neurological representation of our Symbolic Matrix - and comparable to its early stages of magic, myth and religion - our brain is totally unwilling to lend its cells, its binding-capacity and its membranes in an equal way to the different levels of cultural existence. Freeing up mental capacity out of its previous bindings, its neurological circles and preformed patterns is an exhausting process between individual and group. And it is only the intensity of merging patterns which can perform such cultural creation. Most helpful are music, language and the collective use of tools as they overwrite our old and fast instinct-reactions with the much slower indirect but reality-proven and powerful symbolic forms.

The Matrix of Mental Formation is a permanent building-site and it is only the lower floors of this building who seem ready or show a strong enough ability to be

sustainable. Beyond that, the matrix shows ongoing signs of deconstruction which have to be repaired and renovated by the daily re-enacting of cultural experience. It demands the ongoing use of language and collective work to keep the Matrix - and our consciousness, as its inner representation - alive. Longer periods of inactivity or isolation help to destroy this net of culture. It is also sometimes our laziness which allows it to be replaced by empty tradition and preformed patterns, and such a loss of spontaneity and creativity can, over a long period, and in isolation descend into early forms of mental illness or group-paranoia.

It has to be said that the Matrix is a living object. It clearly does not define the routes of human activity and consciousness but it provides a moving structure from which a likelihood of possibilities and how they might function can be drawn. Nonetheless, looking at the Matrix, it would be wrong to totally replace terms of substance by terms of function. The new move is much more about developing a metamorphosis of *Gestaltung*, about discovering a whole group of different qualities of symbolic formation: a new creation at the interchange of patterns, both of them consisting of varying layers of substance and function.

### **Towards a New Theory of Psychopathology**

Cassirer declared in 1923, that the correspondents of symbolic formation relate to each other like two complementary patterns ('*Bewegungsformen*'). There are different qualities in this active clash with reality:

1. the emergence of patterns in both correspondents, which means the carving of a figure out of its own background but also the capacity to initiate a structural process on the correspondent's side.
2. to facilitate a wholeness between the acting partners while remaining in a process of ongoing creative tension.
3. the ability of both correspondents to accept structural connotations from the complementary side, thus meaning that the own inner structure is not altered by a direct exchange of corresponding patterns but by the arousal of previously inactive constellations within the own setting.
4. the collective agreement on paradigms and ideologies to secure our daily undertakings, our risky moves, our dangerous experiments. They do prevent that the failure of an individual act undermines the sensefulness of our existence.

The model proposed is a combination of Gestalt and gestalt-theoretical terminology, as well as of the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer and my personal experience in clinical practice over more than twenty years. Coming back to the ideas of Gestalt-theory, I would like to stress the point that in the Matrix model there is no preference for the phenomenal (as in contrast to the virtual), no preference of the sensual (as in contrast to the abstract), no preference of evidence-based relationship (as being superior to repetition or intensifying). There is no preference for a so-called critical reasonable point of view but there is an indispensable radical equality in all ways of world-making - meaning that in all of them, concrete and abstract aspects

come to the surface, albeit an always different creation of tension. There is quite intensive research at present on 'ontological perspectivism'. This term has been created by Barry Smith to clarify that it is not only possible to use different paradigms to explain the world but a substantial need of plural and parallel ways of world-making, an urge for partial different systems of categories to grasp the results of research, to unify them and thus come closer to reality.

The present Matrix has been created with the intention of making those different parallel perspectives compatible with each other. My thesis is that all levels of world-making - independent from their cultural content - are symbolically-linked patterns of complementary complexity, or, expressed in a mathematical term or in a group-theoretical term: the Matrix can be considered as a group with the connecting element of complementary complexity.

The dominance of Kraeplian psychopathology has, for many years, blurred my understanding of mental illness. It took me years to find out that its true core and essence lies in the loss of human self-evidence and the breakdown of agreed world-making. I came to discover that our daily tasks are not carried out on solid ground and that madness is not an individual failure, but that we are like a group of artists, performing our act in the top of a circus, using safety-nets to prevent us from falling and that these safety-nets are not a naturally given but a result of our own individual efforts linked to those of our group – a fragile construct which can fall apart easily and actually does fall apart instantly in mental crises.

Mental illness is still a puzzling mixture, still poorly understood, but driven by the motivation to regain cultural competence, to re-establish a new equilibrium between ourselves and the others, and to establish something new where something old has broken down. The German term for madness is 'Verruecktheit', meaning that things are no longer in their proper place, but also implicating that there is no way back to a sensible order.

This different view on psychopathology - the Matrix - opens a road to deconstruct schizophrenia and psychosis, to untie the knot and to lift the chaos surrounding our desperate efforts to explain the loss of self evidence and world-making. Looking at the Matrix of Mental Formation, there is now a possibility to allocate the fragments of lost paradigms, to identify the compensatory re-emerging cultural patterns, to differentiate them from defensive instinctive reactions or from neurological entities. By using the matrix as a system of invariants of experience we may find a way to better understand the relatedness of underlying structures and hence to tackle "Verruecktheit": to put things back where they belong or to find a new world where they might function anew.

Regarding psychopathological classification, such an approach could open up additional knowledge about the character, signs and symptoms on which we focus. The Matrix of Mental Formation might contribute to the development of an ontology of psychopathology and show a way out of the 'dead-end street' of old Kraeplian and Bleulerian classifications and allow more optimism for patients and professionals alike when it comes to severe mental illness.

### Summary

During the 1920's in Germany a discussion emerged which took a fresh approach towards the development of consciousness beyond neurological localisation-theory, Kraeplinean psychopathology and psychoanalysis. In 1920 it was the psychiatrist, Arthur Kronfeld, who suggested tracing back mental performance to ontologically irreducible qualities to secure the logic and the theory of psychiatry. Two years later, Ernst Cassirer published his main oeuvre, 'Philosophy of Symbolic Forms' based on his studies of mathematics, language and civilisation which aimed to explain the creation of human self-understanding and, deriving from this, a fresh view on psychopathological phenomena. 'Symbolic forms' are trans-cultural 'invariants of experience' which emerge as magic, myth, religion, language, politics, science and art. Those publicly agreed ways of world-making are directly linked to the development of consciousness. Their ability to facilitate the tension between inner self and environment in various ways helps to build up a 'Matrix of Mental Formation', an artificial construct of culture which breaks down in mental crisis. Those pathological conditions of breakdown were in the focus of research by neuropathologist Kurt Goldstein who had gained huge clinical experience while treating brain-damaged soldiers in World War I. His theoretical background was the newly founded 'Gestalt'-movement but, at the same time, he read and adopted Cassirer's philosophy of 'symbolic forms'. He tried to understand symptoms not as isolated expressions of local damage in the nervous system but as "attempted solutions" the organism has arrived at once it has been altered by disease. This dynamic theoretical approach was used not only to explain phenomena of brain injury aphasia but also schizophrenic symptoms. These interesting traces of discussion surrounding a 'New Psychopathology' were brought to a halt by fascism and war.

This presentation tries to reconstruct the once productive tension between Gestalt- and Symbol-theory. Based on its foundations, a 'Matrix of Mental Formation' is suggested which promotes a new view of psychopathology and makes way toward an altered clinical practice.

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