

John Michael Krois

Ernst Cassirer's Unpublished Papers



Born 1943 in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. B.A. 1968 and M.A. 1970 from Ohio University, Ph.D. in 1975 from the Pennsylvania State University, Habilitation at the Philipps-Universität Marburg in 1988. Teaching positions held at the Technische Universität Braunschweig, Universität Trier, and Emory University. Present position: Privatdozent für Philosophie at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Publications: (Mitherausgeber) *Ernst Cassirer: Symbol, Technik, Sprache*, Felix Meiner Verlag (1985); *Cassirer, Symbolic Forms and History*, Yale University Press (1987). — Address: Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Philosophisches Institut, 4000 Düsseldorf.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with the intention of working, during my two-month stay as a guest, on the *Ernst Cassirer Nachlass-Edition*, specifically on (1) finishing the plan of the edition and (2) completing the first volume, consisting of texts and drafts for a fourth volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. This I did, but I also did much more and even what I expected to do went differently than I had anticipated. To explain: Ernst Cassirer, it is well known, was an exception in this century of intellectual isolation, someone who was on the inside of thinking in radically different fields that normally are considered domains for specialists: relativity and quantum physics, the theory of myth, *Literaturwissenschaft*, Renaissance thought, political science, philosophy of language. Cassirer is an accepted authority among insiders in all of these fields. Organizing his unpublished papers (which cover all the different areas) into an edition (20 volumes) was a task I needed to finish by August. Most of the work was done before I came to the Kolleg, but the exasperating final organization remained to be completed. I know that it was made easier by being here. In conversations with the fellows and other guests and visitors to the Kolleg I experienced a relaxation of thought barriers and professionalized seriousness. In one sense I felt as though I was confronted with a personification of Cassirer's thought world in which so many different perspectives compete for attention. I am sure that being surrounded by people whose radically different interests did not prevent them from making sense to one

another helped me with my first task which, by the way, was completed on July 12.

The first volume of the edition was nearly finished, but I brought with me a long list of problems to be solved in the editorial footnotes. These involved locating hard to find editions of works from various fields of research. The Kolleg's librarians helped me condense months of work into a few weeks and made solving these problems a pleasure.

In the midst of my stay I made a trip to Yale to check Cassirer's papers and, before returning, visited persons who knew Cassirer. On one of those visits I made an unexpected discovery of a number of Cassirer's hitherto unknown papers and correspondence. I was able to bring it all to the Kolleg to organize it for possible publication. To my surprise it contained letters by Aby Warburg, Hermann Cohen, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Mann. At the Kolleg I was able to discuss the correspondence with various persons and was able to make arrangements for its publication. I'll not forget the experience of reviewing the Warburg letters one afternoon with Horst Bredekamp, Adam Labuda and Günter Metken. Clearly, I had brought this material to the right place for its brief stay in Germany before Federal Express took the originals back to New York.

Finally, with Yehuda Elkana's help, it was also possible to organize the *Wissenschaftlicher Beirat* of the Cassirer edition. I would like to think that "von hier and heute" there is going to be a new discovery of Ernst Cassirer's way of thinking and not just of his writings. In addition to the tasks completed, some new ones also took on form during my stay at the Kolleg. In particular, my discovery of more materials for a Cassirer biography in Berlin's now readily accessible archives helped me to solidify my plan to write a biography of Cassirer focusing on the intellectual climate of the 1920s.