

Civilizations as 'Aesthetic Absolute'. A Morphological Approach to Mittel-Europa

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'What is important is to understand that every fact is already a theory. The blue of the sky already demonstrates the fundamental laws of chromatics. We should not look for anything behind these phenomena; they themselves are the theory'
Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, n. 575

Because of the density of the aphorism, the quotation above implies more than the words seem to say explicitly. It refers to an apprehension of reality in a poetic and conceptual mode, a vision of the world and humanity opposed to the mechanistic one that emerged from eighteenth century rationalism. Indeed Goethe is a milestone in the history of the themes inherited from ancient traditions and the Renaissance that have in common the project of integrating 'the science of humankind, the science of nature and a study of the destiny of humanity through the adventure of existence'.¹

This project unites in the twentieth-century the authors, ideas and theoretical models discussed here. They form the strand of thought labelled 'historical morphology' (or 'cultural morphology'), one of the aspects of religious ethnology, and the history of religions that is particularly the concern of the Germanic states (Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Baltic countries). Owing to its integrative character, this strand extends into various fields such as the history of ideas, art history and literary history.

Marked by a strong reaction against scientism and positivism, cultural morphology offers, as an alternative to these traditions, a 'morphological' or 'physiognomical' approach to civilizations. The mode of apprehension it advocates is opposed to the cognitive methods of modern science on three fundamental points: a) it claims to be an *art* rather than a *method*; b) its knowledge is based on the perceptible *intuition* the object of study awakens in the mind of the researcher, an intuition that by its very nature is related to aesthetics; c) it makes use of *analogy* as a method of validating its discoveries, postulating an isomorphic relationship between the organic world of nature and the historical world of human culture.

The conceptual environment of cultural morphology

In order to get a better grasp of where cultural morphology lies, it is necessary to return to the distinction, introduced in the nineteenth century but still operative in the twentieth in many areas of the human sciences, between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, between a science

that 'explains' human behaviours and an art that attempts to 'understand' their inner meaning, and then to interpret them.²

The school of cultural morphology is naturally at the *Verstehen* end of the spectrum. It shares a 'poetics' common to other areas of the research carried on in Central Europe. This poetics can be perceived not only in stylistic and rhetorical conventions, but also through the parallel treatment of three terms: human civilizations, the work of art, the morphology of natural organisms. Several consequences flow from this parallelism as postulated. First, as each civilization reflects a quite specific configuration, it may be likened to one of the natural varieties among the many living species. Like them it experiences a life cycle that runs from the seed phase to full flowering and then decline. But just as every organic species represents a high point, a paradigmatic model of the achievement of balanced and harmonious relations, both internally and from the outside observer's viewpoint, another metaphor suggests itself to the student of a civilization: it is like a work of art, an 'aesthetic absolute'. The specific nature of this concept is that it has both some objective aspects – internal harmony of the work between its constituent parts and the whole – and some subjective aspects – the ability of the aesthetic object to arouse a feeling of aesthetic pleasure in the spectator by virtue of the harmony of its proportions. From this double metaphor likening a civilization to a natural organism and to a work of art flows the morphological method, which claims to be essentially intuitive. The study of a people's cultural characteristics is supposed to allow the observer to grasp intuitively, behind this unity of meaning and form, the 'creative force', the active formative principle that gives the civilization in question its unique configuration.

It is in this area, in this 'poetics', which is heavily influenced by ideas from biology and Romantic aesthetics, that cultural morphology is situated. Three writers appear most representative: the German ethnologists Leo Frobenius (1873–1938) and Adolf Jensen (1889–1965) and the Hungarian historian of religions Karoly Kerényi (1907–1974).

Leo Frobenius started out as an ethnologist in Melanesia, then studied African cultures. The intense research activity that surrounded him was centred in Frankfurt. He founded the Frobenius Institute, which started up in competition with Father Wilhelm Schmidt's Vienna School; he endowed the Institute with a prestigious journal, *Paideuma*, whose first issue contained the School's theoretical manifesto.³

Adolf Jensen, one of Frobenius's students, took over from him as head of the Institute. He wrote several monographs⁴ and carried out research in Melanesia, Ceram, Indonesia, and Africa. The sciences of religion owe to him the concept, which has been taken into their technical terminology, of '*Dema*', a mythical figure characterized by being destined to die and come back to life, whose fragmented body is supposed to have been the origin of cultivated plants.

Karoly Kerényi, a Hungarian philologist who specialized in the classical world, decided to continue the work started by the mythologist Walter F. Otto. He was the author of a seminal work on Greek and Roman religions, *Die antike Religion* (Amsterdam 1940 and 1942), of *Introduction to the essence of mythology*, written with C.G. Jung,⁵ and *Umgang mit göttlichen Wesen und Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos*.⁶ With Kerényi as with Frobenius, aesthetic and religious seem to merge into the unitary concept of 'culture', each historical variant of which is characterized by its own style. The elective affinities that link these two scholars who have several areas of study in common are expressed in Kerényi's keen collaboration on Frobenius's journal *Paideuma*, particularly during the 1950s. These affinities are also

demonstrated by the many quotations, drawn from Frobenius's writings, which punctuate Kerényi's work. In addition, like Jensen, Kerényi worked on mythological material from the island of Ceram.

The spokesmen for cultural morphology have not all been specialists in exotic civilizations. A certain number of historians, such as Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), or writers, such as Hermann Keyserling (1880–1946), took up the same project: setting up a systematic typology of world views, each of which would be organized around an original style giving each one a kind of 'informed reality', which would be guided by a internal regulating principle of a more organic than mechanistic character.

The two areas of study that cultural morphology focuses on are religion and art. The choice of these two subjects is not random. Better than any others, these expressions of spiritual life alone are likely to provide a key that unlocks a culture.⁷ Put forward first by Herder in the 1770s, then given pride of place by Romantic anthropology, the idea that religion and art occupy a special place in the study of human civilizations is now reinforced by the choice of a specific methodology. By studying religion and art, now transformed by a metonymic process into the 'exemplary locus' of the whole culture, the ethnologist and the historian would have access to the typical spiritual configuration of each civilization under examination.

This speculative film that runs through the culture of Central Europe underpins cultural morphology's thought. In its own right it is a chapter that would merit further exploration for several reasons. First of all, with a view to an improved knowledge of the history of the anthropological sciences in the twentieth century, and more particularly in order to evaluate more precisely the indirect influence that morphology had, through Franz Boas, on American cultural anthropology of the 1920s. Then, because the decided unease that reading these authors may arouse nowadays runs alongside the discovery of ideas, expressed by these same authors, that are surprisingly topical. This feeling of both unease and topicality needs to be analysed, first avoiding any dogmatic closure in relation to the ideological direction of the school, but also without indulgence as regards what causes the feeling. As far as the stimulating beginnings of cultural morphology are concerned, it is hard to deny that Frobenius, Jensen and Kerényi were, each in his own way, ahead of their time. They were aware of the historian's subjective involvement in the study of distant civilizations that are distant in time and space.⁸ These topical and stimulating aspects of cultural morphology should not allow us to ignore certain questionable and worrying areas within the spectrum that forms the backdrop to this strand of thought. Its critics have not hesitated to label it 'reactionary', and this will be the subject of our concluding remarks.

Thus far we have only discussed the conceptual environment of cultural morphology. Now we shall first explore the historical context of which it is a part and outline the themes that compose it; then we shall examine the logical basis, both implicit and explicit, on which this area of thought is founded.

The context of cultural morphology

The intellectual context that is the backdrop to the emergence of cultural morphology becomes clear if we consider the position of German culture in the nineteenth century. A

short digression is necessary in order to mention both the debate that followed the crisis of the Hegelian model of the philosophy of history and the advent of contemporary historicism, within which the morphological school has its place.

Contemporary German historicism arose out of the dissolution of the Romantic vision of history. This vision included the idea of historical development on the basis of the premise that the finite and the infinite are identical, and saw in the successive phases of history the gradual unfolding of an absolute principle immanent in this development. Thus in Romantic historicism the acceptance of the irreducible uniqueness of every historical phenomenon was mitigated by the idea that this uniqueness is merely the expression of a universal force, or absolute principle, which, as it evolves, is actualized in an infinite multitude of specific forms (and in this way makes uniqueness and universality converge). From this idea of an absolute principle of which historical development is the actualization, two main orientations emerged. One was strictly historiographic: it leads from Herder to the work of the historical school and Ranke. The other, which was more determinedly speculative, took post-Kantian idealism as its starting point and ended up with Hegel's philosophy of history.

The first orientation emphasized a concrete exploration of historical phenomena by developing and using tools (philology, archaeology, historical criticism, etc.) that might elucidate the uniqueness of concrete historical forms. The convergence of universal and individual was to be sought in the infinite multiplicity of historical phenomena and their organic connection. So, when it encountered concrete historiography, the premise of an absolute principle at the root of the historical process underwent a change of emphasis as an attempt was made to identify its links with lived reality. This strand of German historicism resorted to *intuition* as the equivalent of the belief in the *fundamentally irrational nature* of the absolute principle, in order to apprehend the force in the uniqueness of historical phenomena that is immanent in them. Here it was not a philosophical construction, therefore, but concrete historical research carried out on an intuitive basis, that would assist in the apprehension of the convergence of universal and individual.

The second orientation demonstrates the attempt to reformulate the Romantic historical vision on the basis of the speculative schema developed by post-Kantian idealism. Its particular field is not concrete historiographic work but the philosophy of history. So history for Hegel becomes the development of the absolute Spirit, conceived as the Spirit of the world, through a succession of 'stages' or 'moments', linked together by a dialectic relationship, which will lead it to become aware of itself. The structure of history is then understood as a *rational structure*, and historical development is seen as a *dialectical process* in which the absolute Spirit realizes itself. Philosophy's task is thus to justify the convergence of universal and individual that occurs in each moment of the historical process and to recognize its rational nature. It was in this context, and influenced by these two strands, that contemporary historicism, as founded by Dilthey, began.

The crisis of Romantic culture, which became evident in 1848, can be traced through several phenomena: A) opposition to Hegel's philosophy of history, which was manifested in the rejection of two of his basic ideas, viz: *a*) the concept of the unique and universal evolution of human history, *b*) the guiding principle of historical rationality; B) updating of the legacy of the German school of history, which went back to Herder and was dominated by a strong anti-speculative tendency and a firm vocation for concrete historiographic research; C) adoption of the Romantic notion of the fundamental irrationality

of history; D) re-opening of neo-Kantian questions, in particular by Dilthey who attempted to extend them into the field of the science of culture or science of the spirit (which he called 'the world of history'); E) the debate with positivism.

The middle and the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of what we call 'contemporary historicism'. However, the break with Romantic culture was not a radical one. In order to counter the inevitable agnostic effects of the relativism connected to an anti-universalist and anti-absolute position, which already existed in Herder's Romantic thought, an attempt was made to find new links to the rationalist critical tradition. The Baden school (represented by the neo-Kantians W. Windelband and H. Rickert) and Dilthey himself refused to abandon the idea of a methodological basis for historical scholarship according to critical procedures. Thus, although the argument with Romantic culture was launched at the start of the historicist movement, nevertheless later on, when the movement took on a decidedly neo-Romantic flavour, criticism of rationalism and positivism became more thorough-going. Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Romantic themes were recuperated by the school of 'cultural morphology' or 'historical morphology', which was also inspired by historicism, though of a 'neo-Romantic' variety.

Cultural morphology's themes

At the turn of the century the picture outlined above was redrawn as a result of the emergence of new positions – including those adopted by cultural morphology – based on a resolutely 'irrationalist'⁹ approach. A series of themes fundamental to the morphological school were then elaborated. They were connected with two typically Romantic concepts, that of 'organism' – understood as a living whole governed by an internal purpose – and that of 'artistic beauty' – conceived as a complex unit bringing together the experience of both the senses and the intelligence, and also governed by an autonomous purpose arising from a relationship of internal congruence between the parts and the whole.

It is possible to identify five themes that constitute cultural morphology. The first is the essentially irrational basis of history – a thesis already formulated by Herder and Humboldt, but rejected by the Romantic speculative philosophical tradition personified by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. A concern with aesthetics already seems to have formed the basis of historical research for Herder. Taken up by Dilthey, but diluted by the hermeneutic project of methodically establishing historical knowledge, the theme of the irrational basis of history was taken up yet again by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who expanded it. As regards historical morphology, it made the irrational basis of history one of its fundamental themes. Adopting Herder's ideas, the school postulated history as irrational in its very essence: it springs out of spiritual motives and actions whose nature is 'other' than that of logic and practical applied rationality (economics, for example). Frobenius, Jensen and Kerényi were particularly interested in what must have taken place in the creative imagination of human beings in a primeval era when the world was revealed to them, plunging them into a state of 'existential shock'.¹⁰ The second theme is the idea of historical originality or uniqueness. This idea is underpinned by a concept of culture understood as a self-sufficient world, a kind of living organism (see Humboldt

and Herder), ruled by a unique and irreducible stamp or style. Herder had already laid the aesthetic foundation for the Romantic concept of 'soul of a people' or 'spirit of nations' when he stated in 1774 that these souls cannot be compared precisely because they are expressed poetically and are distinguished from one another artistically.¹¹ So, by opposing the eighteenth century scepticism, which emphasized the infinite variety of peoples and customs, Herder had introduced the poetic, and aesthetically based, criterion of the impossibility of comparing artistic creations with one another.¹² For cultural morphology too all manifestations of a given culture have within them a basic aesthetic 'tonality', a 'style' irreducible to a functional or goal-oriented interpretation external to the style itself and essentially and fundamentally anti-utilitarian (indeed style is what goes beyond the functional: it belongs to the realm of pure 'expressivity').¹³

The third theme is the 'living' dimension of cultures, a theme that is partly inherited from the Hegelian philosophy of history, whose idea of unique and universal development cultural morphology nevertheless repudiates. Instead cultural morphology retains from Hegelianism the principle of permanent movement, but this living, dynamic dimension is now transferred from without to within each culture. Each one has its cycle, similar to the cycle of natural organisms, plants and animals, a cycle whose movement starts with a first founding experience of interaction with the environment which gives a civilization its own peculiar expressivity. This expressivity finally attains its stylistically fulfilled form, which is truly 'organic', and maintains it as long as it still has the trace of that initial experience; then, ineluctably, it degenerates, becomes rigid, mechanical and 'inorganic'.¹⁴

The fourth theme is the morphological analogy between nature and culture. The stylistic peculiarity of civilizations stems from a formative principle of a spiritual nature. However this develops not separate from and in opposition to the simpler organic forms, but through an evolution similar to that of the organic world. According to this notion then, there is no real opposition between history and nature any more than there is between the biological and psychic fields. Historical world and organic world are intertwined. But there is a hierarchical articulation between the orders of this unitary whole (spiritual-psychic above, material-organic below; at the bottom biological and utilitarian functions, at the top spiritual anti-utilitarian functions). These orders are involved in the same living process, guided by a single principle.¹⁵ It was probably from Herder that cultural morphology drew this analogical procedure. The human spiritual universe (the historical world), whose essence is not unlike the living one of the natural universe, appears to be organized according to categories analogous to the natural world's. So between nature and culture there exists a relationship of analogy such that it becomes possible to see the spiritual universe of culture as a sort of 'third kingdom', on the lines of the mineral and the vegetable-animal kingdoms, above the inorganic and the organic, a kingdom that evolves independently in accordance with its own laws which are nevertheless the counterpart of nature's.¹⁶

The fifth of cultural morphology's themes is the analogy between culture and the work of art. To the extent that cultural morphology understands human civilizations as concretions of an 'active faculty' moved by a 'formative impulse', concrete cultural expressions (religion and art in particular) simply make visible by actualizing it their internal law of fulfilment, in accordance with a form of which this internal law is the potential final cause. Thus the morphological approach succeeds in overcoming the opposition between content and form, means and end, since the form makes visible a content understood as

the stylistic principle which is irreducible to anything other than itself.¹⁷ The nature of this principle that organizes the cultural unity of a given civilization is clearly analogous to the nature of the principle that governs the aesthetic unity of artistic beauty, such as it was defined by Romanticism (in particular by Karl Philipp Moritz and after him by Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*).

To conclude, a profound symmetry seems to link these two governing principles which are active in the field of art, organic life and the history of civilizations. These autonomous governing principles, animated by a dynamic formative force, do not in any of the three cases contradict the logical criteria of mechanistic causality, and seem to depend on a kind of internal purpose. Romantic thought had already established an analogy between work of nature and work of art.¹⁸ As for cultural morphology, following Herder it added a third term to this two-term parallelism – human civilizations, which share several characteristics with the work of art and distinguish it from works of nature. Instead of spontaneously creating forms as nature does, the artist and human civilizations carry out an activity that imitates nature, with which they have what one might call a relationship ‘at one remove’. But far from being a passive imitation of nature, the work of art has to be a ‘formative imitation’; it is completely separated from nature, to which it nevertheless refers. Just like every true human civilization, it is what has become an autonomous form by comparison with the natural referent that inspired it.

The five points elaborated above give us a clearer understanding of why, according to the defenders of cultural morphology, every civilization may be viewed as whole in which form and content, ends and means coincide; why culture is essentially ‘expressive’; and why, based on a premise of equivalence between the biological, aesthetic and cultural worlds, the only appropriate methodology for the study of civilizations is the intuitive act.

Frobenius’s morphological model

Thus the themes that make up cultural morphology depend on a more or less implicit postulate, viz. the isomorphism of work of art, biological organism and culture, or, to take a slightly different example, what is beautiful, what is alive and civilization. A paradigmatic instance of this isomorphism is supplied by the work of Leo Frobenius.

Known among Africa specialists for his writings on African art and symbolism, Frobenius was the incarnation of that Germanic spirit which at the turn of the century openly contested the ideals of positivist science (which he identified with materialism and evolutionism), and that found its home – as Frobenius himself said – in the ‘German mysticism’, conceived as the antithesis of rationalism and scientism that were dominant in European, particularly English and French, culture.¹⁹ Frobenius and his school should be seen against the background of the crisis of naturalist ethnology with its evolutionist bent, as well as of the German historico-cultural school from which Frobenius himself came.²⁰ Frobenius criticized this school on two counts. The first concerned the methods of working, which claimed to provide ethnology with a tool that was supposed to reduce the mass of ethnographic data to a series of cultures defined and ordered according to criteria of space, time and causality. Frobenius criticized the fundamentally mechanistic nature of this method, which he thought would have no demonstrative value in identifying cultural links.²¹ The second criticism, of a more general nature, concerns the priority

attributed to material and technical aspects of human cultures at the expense of forms expressing 'the true orientation of the spiritual life of a people' – more precisely, religious and artistic forms.²² Besides the morphological tradition following Goethe and the organicist tradition going back to the biological thought of the late eighteenth century, Romantic thought also had an influence on Frobenius, particularly as regards his genetic conception of cultures.²³

Frobenius started out from the concept of the substantial unity and homogeneity of culture, which he had no hesitation in calling the 'third Reich' (kingdom)²⁴, after the inorganic kingdom and the kingdom of nature. On to this concept, which went back to the Romantic ideas of Herder and Humboldt, he grafted a second Romantic motif: that of the superior and blissful character of human society at the dawn of the world. From the conjunction of these two themes he constructed a theory that participated in the 'neo-Romantic irrationalism' of his time. In the fields of the history of religions and ethnology more particularly, this irrationalism took the form of the 'classic' theme of the primary nature of the sacred aspect of cultural life in contrast with the profane. All technical and economic human activities are seen by the defenders of this view as merely a by-product of a ritual, or more generally 'sacred', act²⁵. However, for Frobenius this historico-poetic theme became a complete theory of the origins of culture, which is centred in the key concept of '*paideuma*' (literally: 'the person who receives the teaching' but also 'the teaching itself'). In his view this concept was the true object of morphologico-cultural research. To live in the sphere of a particular *paideuma* is to be under its spell, 'rapt' (*ergriffen*) so that one acts and creates essentially under its impulse.²⁶ In other words, every civilization arises under the impulse of 'obscure profound forces' that have 'raised it up', taking it from the animal state to the spiritual state of consciousness of the world, a consciousness capable of 'feeling awe' and 'being moved' by it. According to Frobenius every civilization is therefore characterized by a basic formative principle that gives it a specific 'orientation' and this is actualized in each of this civilization's concrete expressions. But this 'inner orientation' is not the result of a conceptual objectivization. It is the reflection of a primal 'ecstasy', caused long ago by a phenomenon from the world outside consciousness (plant, animal, cosmos, seasonal cycle, etc.), but affecting consciousness and 'captivating' the civilization. This cause of awe and 'ecstasy' is crystallized in cultural expressions, which retain within them a kind of 'trace'.

To render this creative dynamism, which is the origin of every civilization, Frobenius makes use of two concepts: 'expression' (*Ausdruck*) and 'representation' (*Vorstellung*). Every cultural creation (from economy to myth) has its origin as 'expression' in the psychic experience described above. This experience reflects the process of identification of human consciousness with a polarizing aspect of natural reality. Prior to human spiritual history there is thus an experience that has nothing to do either with the intellectual-cognitive ability (knowing the world) or with the practical-economic ability aiming a utilitarian goal (exploiting the world to obtain benefits). On the contrary, prior to this history we find a mode of experience, whose basis is essentially feeling and emotional, fitting into the sequence experience-identification-expression. These two simultaneous moments, ecstasy and expression, are marked by an intense creative effervescence in which the *paideuma* is formed like the fruit of the mimetic process that takes place between man and nature to give the civilization its unique character. At these two moments there follows a second phase, the *representation* of this experience. During this second phase the link with

the initial experience fades. Indeed the *representation* phase constitutes a sort of decline or degeneration compared with the primordial moments of lived *experience* and *expression*, moments when the culture attains its spiritual fulfilment and with it its most complete state of organicity. Because of its 'living', 'anti-utilitarian', purely 'expressive' character, the phase in which the *paideuma* is formed is incapable of being studied through a chain of effects and causes similar to the process that operates in the field of the natural sciences. It can only be 'contemplated'.

This example provided by Frobenius's thought, which sets out the fundamentally irrational, anti-utilitarian, expressive basis for culture, leads us to an examination of two types of analogy: first the implicit morphological analogy, suggested by Frobenius and other writers, between culture and art (and therefore between the methods used to attain an understanding of culture and the methods used to understand the work of art); then the analogy between culture and biological organism.

The relationship between culture and artistic beauty

The link between historical knowledge (or the knowledge of culture) and aesthetic knowledge had already been discussed by Dilthey. Indeed it was from him that Frobenius, Jensen and Kerényi borrowed the concepts of *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Gemüt* (affect or spiritual sensation), which accompanied the concept of 'ecstasy' at the origin of all cultural inventions. This 'ecstasy' or primal awe, ineffable by its very nature – as we have seen – cannot be explained. It can only be 'relived' through a process of immediate intuition that allows the observer to relive this initial moment internally, within his own consciousness.

Frobenius states this clearly and bemoans the fact that he was born at a time when 'men who give priority to the intellect predominate and those who are open to emotion are useless'. To the latter, he adds, ' '. Only one field is open by way of conceiving the source of art as a spurting forth: that of the sacred art of 'ecstasy', an art understood not as *truth* but as the only ontological *reality*, stems the way Frobenius sees the origin of human culture. The moment of artistic and cultural creation is always of the same nature: a childlike rapture. It is withdrawal from the whole rational superstructure, from any utilitarian purpose – these are themes that return to Romantic ideals and feed the figurative arts of his time, from Dadaism to automatic art.²⁷

Cultural morphology's main references have their source essentially in Romantic aesthetics and Goethe's idealist morphology. This is indeed a *topos* for late nineteenth-century philosophical debates. Similar references²⁸ common to all our writers are revealing and lead to two consequences. First at that period, which was dominated by the profound influence of Goethe's thought, Goethe's morphological model of the sciences of nature was transposed to the sciences of culture and thus the whole of culture was reinterpreted in a morphological key. Secondly, this morphological key systematically referred to the notion of 'type', understood as 'marked individuality'. This notion remains at the heart of the concerns about uniqueness of the historical approach that is so closely linked in Germany with the field of art.

In order to assess the influence the canons of Romantic aesthetics had on cultural morphology, it is probably useful to review the criteria formulated by Karl Philipp Moritz

in a series of publications that appeared between 1785 and 1793. According to Moritz these criteria or principles of aesthetics could be reduced to a number of statements, some of which are particularly relevant to our topic:²⁹

1. Art is not imitation of nature (contrary to the definition of art current hitherto). Thus its purpose is not external to itself (it is not imitating nature), it is the creation of 'Beauty'.
2. The Beautiful has no *raison d'être* outside itself. It is its own end. So there is a clear separation between the Beautiful and the useful, between aesthetics and ethics. Beauty is intransitive, it lies in its own fulfilment – and in this sense is pure expression. This is why even individual pleasure is something of subordinate value compared with the supremacy of the beautiful.³⁰
3. Nature created a reflection of the truly Beautiful in humankind through the creation of a special faculty so that 'none of their strengths should remain undeveloped'. This is the 'active faculty'.³¹
4. Thus, insofar as there is imitation in art, this imitation is situated only between the creative activity of nature and the creative activity of the artist. Possessed by a 'competitive impulse to imitate', which compels him to imitate nature by creating, the artist transforms this 'formative impulse' not into simple 'imitation' but into a 'creative formation' that reproduces the beautiful things in nature synecdochically.³²
5. Since it must of necessity 'attach itself to something, the formative faculty chooses some visible, audible or imaginable object on to which it transposes in miniature the glory of supreme beauty'. The creative act is thus polarized within a specific content, which nevertheless achieves the status of Whole.³³
6. The artwork, having by its very nature no external purpose, possesses instead and as a corollary an internal organizing principle. Thus, for Kant, Schelling, Moritz and Novalis, the Beautiful is a product internally ruled by a 'goal-less purpose'. Moritz writes: 'Where an object lacks a use or purpose, this purpose must be sought in the object itself, given that it is meant to arouse pleasure in me . . .'.³⁴
7. The autonomy of the whole that is the artwork, and is a condition of its beauty, results in a paradox: it leaves no room for explanation (which would mean referring to an elsewhere, an authority outside itself, whereas the Beautiful is defined by its absolute autonomy). So Moritz says: 'Because the essence of the beautiful lies in this, one part always becomes expressive and significant through another and the Whole becomes so through itself – it is self-explanatory – it describes itself and so has no need of any subsequent clarification or description, apart from the simple and clear indication of its content'.³⁵ In other words, the artistic message is *expressible* (in poetry or figuration), not *sayable* in ordinary language.
8. The art work and nature share two characteristics: they are both wholes enclosed within themselves, self-sufficient; this similarity lies not in similar forms but in the fact that they have an identical internal structure or organization. The relationship between the constituent parts and the whole is the same. Between nature and artwork there exists the same relationship as between macrocosm and microcosm. The only difference is their respective scales.

Throughout the nineteenth century these eight principles were used again and again as a model for understanding any spiritual product of a historical nature. The connection between history and aesthetics was commented on several times by Dilthey. He was

convinced that the Sciences of the Spirit 'must discover both the generalizing and the individualizing aspects of the historical world'. The typical instance was supplied by historiography, which was attempting 'to understand spiritual phenomena in their particular specificity: the universal is apprehended in the particular'.³⁶ Knowledge of the human historical world is rooted in art, conceived of as an organ for understanding the relationship between uniformity and specificity, a relationship that is actualized in the 'type'. Indeed in history individuation comes into being on the basis of a uniformity interrupted by a series of basic forms 'which return again and again in the interplay of variations', and which are 'the types of the human world'. Thus the 'types' are the middle term between historical uniformity and individuation. They indicate on the one hand the common element that can be found in a given sphere of the human world and on the other its internal norm.³⁷ But the 'type' is apprehended, not by the pure conceptual process, but by artistic vision, poetic creation, which perceives intuitively the consonance between aspects of reality, hidden relationships, common structures. From this comes the function of art, which, as a mediating term between *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and conceptual thought, allows us to know the human world to the extent that it sets in train 'development processes in constant interaction with the environment'.³⁸

But how is the typological knowledge acquired that is capable of apprehending both universal and individual? In Dilthey's philosophy the model of Goethe's creation is related to the importance of the imagination. In taking up an idea from German Romanticism that had linked metaphysically poetry and philology or historiography, Dilthey defends the principle that the imagination, understood as the faculty that gives a form or image, anchored in the lived experience, is the basis of both poetic creation and historical knowledge. He sets up these two fields – poetry and history – as parallel by demonstrating their profound similarity in two areas.

First of all art, and especially poetry, fulfil the role of mediators between the universal and the particular, because they are the incarnation of the process of individuation. The unique lived experience, 'the matter for creation' as Goethe defines it, the source of poetic or artistic elaboration, is always universal. Indeed it is capable of being relived by the interpreter, who also rises to a creative *Erlebnis*. Similarly, the experience of others, relived by the historian, is the foundation for the science of history. This analogy between art and history is confirmed by the fact that art does not reproduce life, but reinvents it as a poetic object. But this reinvention also happens in history, according to Dilthey, to the extent that, as Goethe said: 'A fact in our lives has value not because it is true but because it has significance.'³⁹

Another reason justifies the comparison between art and historiography. It stems from the fact that both art and history have as their object a totality that is created by the association of life and form. Their object is life apprehended through a form. 'Beauty is a living form: it is produced when vision captures life in an image, or when life is breathed into an image', Dilthey himself says, quoting Schiller.⁴⁰

These two analogies between art and history established by Dilthey were re-used by cultural morphology and adapted to its own perspective. This consisted of seeing human civilizations themselves as works of art in their own right, insofar as they appear as totalities created from an association of life + form, and understanding them requires the researcher to perform an aesthetic and intuitive act. Thus it was Dilthey, at the heart of German Romanticism, who first updated the Romantic thesis of the importance of poetics for the systematic study of historical forms of life. And it was the poets, led by Goethe,

who gave pride of place to intuition and established the possibility of intuitive understanding. Intuition as Goethe describes it gave Dilthey – and after him the representatives of historical morphology, who reinterpreted it in irrationalist mode – the opportunity to reopen the debate about the question of the relationship between part and whole, historical unique and universal, and about the type of spiritual faculty that was supposed to effect this creative reappropriation in both art and history.

The relationship between culture and biological organism

The analogy between the nature of aesthetic judgement and the nature of the knowledge of the biological organism is clearly set out by Kant in the *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgement* (1789).⁴¹ When he comes to define the organized being that is the 'organism' in order to distinguish it from the 'machine', Kant says this: 'The machine has only motor power; but the organized being has within it a formative power [*bildende Kraft*] that it communicates to materials.'⁴²

We have already seen this 'formative power' in action in Moritz, who uses it to define the principle of the artwork. A few years later it crops up in the *Critique of Judgement*, defining the organism as well as the aesthetic faculty. It is only from that moment that the parallelism dear to Goethe⁴³, between work of art and biological organism, runs like a red thread through the organicist vision dominating German thought and postulating, from Schelling and Hegel, the association between nature and spirit resulting from a common origin. Romantic thought was monistic, antagonistic to the distinction between subjective order and objective order: the primitive identity of realities remained a postulate that was never denied and was the source of a genuine biological ontology that broke with the preceding scientific tradition. Indeed, the rationalist philosophical tradition excluded from the study of nature the notion of 'plastic forms' and required every natural phenomenon to be explained according to the same specific laws, that is 'mechanistically and mathematically', as Kant has it. By contrast, at the end of the eighteenth century Kant had the audacity to attempt to redefine the boundaries between the mathematical science of nature and biology. In the *Critique of Judgement* he distinguishes two types of knowledge: that which is based on causality, and that which is based on purpose. Causality deals with objective knowledge (the chronological succession of events) participating in the order of process. But purpose deals with the structure of those categories of objects called 'organisms'. For him the notion of 'organism' is inconceivable without taking account of the concept of purpose. Indeed he defines the organism as 'an organized product of nature in which everything is both end and means'.⁴⁴ The same distinction between those two natural domains, the dead and the living, is also present in Goethe's work.⁴⁵ Goethe's theory had a great influence not only on the development of biology but also on the historico-human sciences.⁴⁶

By the end of the eighteenth century the ideas developed within biology had already changed the direction of scientific research. From Linné and Cuvier the emphasis of biological research was henceforth on morphology. This focus on the totality of forms opened the way to an understanding of both general and particular. Indeed it was this link between the totality of forms and the specific form that was the essence of organic nature. But it was indisputably Goethe, who took up the concept of 'type' developed by Cuvier (a concept that would be used to elaborate the thesis of the relationship between

the generality and the particularity of organic forms), who was the great interpreter of morphological ideas.⁴⁷ It is his contribution to the development of the notion of 'morphological type' that is the constant reference point for German historicism from Dilthey to Keyserling by way of Frobenius, Spengler and Kerényi.

In contrast to Cuvier, Goethe postulated the notion of type, not as static and geometrical (like a 'set of basic constant relationships', observable in the structure of organisms), but as dynamic. He recognized no permanent reality but that which is manifested through the development of life, which we ourselves experience ('apprehending the eternal in the ephemeral'). This powerful tension between being and becoming, stability and change, eternal and transitory, is summed up by Goethe in the concept of *form*.⁴⁸ Indeed in the notion of form a new dimension makes its appearance. It is not perceptible in its spatial extension alone (like the type); it also participates in time and it is there that it is fulfilled and established. So deviations and irregularities compared with the rule, which are perceptible in process, show us that organic nature really is living and subject to change, which allows us to apprehend intuitively the 'formal essence' and to contemplate it.

Neither this spirit nor this immanent dynamic law were present in Cuvier's concept of type. It was precisely this spiritual element, introduced by Goethe, that gave first Dilthey and then cultural morphology the opportunity to pick up naturalist concepts like *type* and *form*, for which a mechanistic interpretation is incompatible with the human world of the spirit, with the cultural-spiritual human universe. According to Goethe all superior organic beings are constructed in accordance with a prototype; the diversity of forms, on the other hand, 'stems from everything that necessarily determines relations with the outside world, and so one might reasonably assume original simultaneous diversity, and continuous and gradual change, in order to be able to account for both constant and deviant appearances'.⁴⁹ This prototype is perceptible, not by the senses, but by the spirit as it is presented with the variety of its manifestations. In this way Goethe expresses ahead of its time the ideal of an 'idealist morphology', whose premises were already present in the debate between Herder and the rationalist philosophers about the irreducibility of national cultures to a single model that was universally valid: 'Should we put them all in the same basket? The essence of all periods and all peoples? What nonsense! Every nation contains the heart of its happiness within itself, just as a sphere has within itself its barycentre'.⁵⁰

Goethe simply transfers this idea from the history of the world to life in general. Like Herder, he too states the impossibility of isolating from the totality of life one of these specific 'types' or 'species', and demonstrating them like a canon, a general rule. The relationship between universal and particular, which is at the heart of the Romantic tradition, makes the factual and the theoretical, not the terms of an opposition, but the two elements of an indissoluble unitary relationship. According to Goethe, between universal and particular there exists, not a relationship of hierarchical implication (*subsumieren*), but rather the possibility of an ideal or symbolic representation. It is only by taking account of this link between idea and manifestation that one can hope to understand Goethe's theory of form and therefore that of the morphological school. Thus the principle that rules nature reveals itself to the naturalist, not through an unlimited series of scattered and fragmentary observations, but in a single 'pregnant case' and through a sudden intuition.⁵¹ So it seems clear that Goethe's concept of genesis is 'dynamic', not historical. It refers to an *ideal* not a *factual genesis*. What category of knowledge does 'idealist morphology' belong to then? Although it is not a theory of historical filiation, nevertheless it

postulates an internal rule other than historical causality, viz. formal purpose (or 'goal-less purpose'), already postulated by Kant, who made it the basis of aesthetic judgement and saw it as the organizing principle of organisms.

* * *

Let us consider three of Goethe's themes: a) life understood as a dynamic principle ruled by an internal purpose (Kant's '*principle of formal purpose*'), whose nature is both organic and spiritual; b) the life of organisms seen in their constant interaction with their environment; c) the question of the ideal and not real genesis of forms. These three themes are all 'topical' issues for cultural morphology, which picked them up and applied them specifically to the study of historical civilizations. As regards the first of these three themes, that is the vitalist vision, cultural morphology reinterprets it as the manifestation of a parabola, similar to the biological one that civilizations are subject to. This arc goes through a launch phase, a development phase and decline, governed by a self-regulating principle (the 'formal purpose' principle), that the school reinterprets by means of the notion of 'direction' and/or 'destiny'. As far as the second theme is concerned – the interaction of these living organisms with their surroundings – cultural morphology revisits it and takes it as the interaction between historical civilizations and their natural environment, an interaction which is actualized in these civilizations embracing their '*paideumatic*' principle. And finally the third theme (the ideal genesis of forms) becomes a reconstruction of the ideal emergence of civilizations ('ecstasy' and 'existential shock' when confronted with the world), rather than the factual reconstruction of that emergence.

The morphological approach, then, draws its inspiration from Goethe when – like Herder too – it sees cultures as wholes closed in on themselves. They are studied by cultural morphology as varieties of a single type or the actualization of many original essences, conceived of in the '*Urphänomenon*' mode.⁵² These archetypal spiritual essences, of which civilizations are merely concrete realizations, have within them the crystallized principle creating their form. And this occurs at the precise moment in their organic cycle when their 'vitality' reaches its highest point, the vitality that is signalled by the state of 'awe' and 'existential shock' in contemplation of the world. This experience of awe, which Goethe called 'the highest capacity of human thought', sets a culture's '*paideumatic principle*', its internal rule, particular *style* and 'destiny'.

Historical morphology is indebted to Goethe in yet another aspect. We have seen the part intuition plays in the morphological approach, understood not simply as a method, but also as inseparable from a *Weltanschauung*. According to Goethe this feeling of life running through everything is supposed to come from a kind of certainty supplied by intuition. Intuition clarifies this feeling by grounding it in a basis of certainty. This is because for Goethe life, understood as a continuous living form, cannot be apprehended as a concept, which can only separate and not truly unite. So alongside the analytical work carried out by concepts there must be the synthetic work of the imagination ('precise sensitive imagination', which is presumed to apprehend the unity underlying the variety of living forms. Thus Goethe's work on the morphology of living forms supplied a model that could be transposed from the field of organic life to historical life as well as aesthetics. However, for this transposition to be possible, it is essential to start from the premise that there is no radical opposition between the natural biological world and the world of the spirit, but that an internal necessity embraces both these worlds and links them

metaphysically. This is why the reworking of Goethe's thought by cultural morphology constitutes a return to Romantic philosophy and at the same time to the naturalism implied by its *Weltanschauung*.

'Life' as an active principle plays a major part in cultural morphology. 'Reality' and 'life' are synonymous for these writers. Although Spengler picks up Dilthey's opposition between sciences of nature and sciences of the spirit, he does so (like Frobenius, Jensen and Kerényi) by contrasting *sciences of the evolved* with *sciences of the evolving*.⁵³ For the representatives of cultural morphology only the historical world – where human beings, by observing themselves, can perceive the creative process in action – is truly living, constantly progressing and changing. It cannot be perceived by logico-intellectual means, because this distorts phenomena by applying to them the principle of mechanistic causality. It is intuition, 'precise sensitive imagination', that gives us access to the creative process which is irreducible to the principle of mechanistic causality, time and space.

The encounter between the aesthetic legacy of Moritz and Kant and Goethe's morphological ideas required cultural morphology to make several modifications: for the representatives of this strand of thought (especially O. Spengler) Goethe's 'living nature' became 'the world as history', or (for Frobenius) 'the third kingdom', that is to say the world of the spiritual life of civilizations seen in the plural development of their forms and their evolving future, accessible through the immediacy of intuition.

Thus the distinction between nature and history is situated, not at the level of the heterogeneity of objects, but in the method of studying these objects. Indeed the world can be apprehended as 'history' or 'nature', as 'evolving' or 'evolved', as 'living, in permanent transformation and metamorphosis' (the organic world) or 'dead, fixed in static forms' governed by mechanistic and immutable laws (those that govern the mathematical and factual knowledge of nature). And since any organism is a unique form, it cannot be defined by recourse to a causal explanation based on general laws. In order to apprehend it one must make use of 'precise sensitive imagination'. This is where the 'physiognomic' method makes its mark as cultural morphology's method par excellence.

Ancient physiognomy discovered people's moral tendencies or psychological nature by studying external morphological features. Similarly, cultural morphology's physiognomy, applied to the study of civilizations, assumes an intrinsic analogy between their external expressions and their internal spiritual orientation, and suggests that a necessary and organic link, conceived as 'direction' and 'destiny', connects these two worlds of symbolizing and symbolized. This relationship between visible and invisible, between external form and internal principle, inevitably links to the idea of a fundamental unity of Being, a harmony of spheres in reciprocal compatibility.⁵⁴

But what exactly was this 'great time' to consist of, that was proclaimed by Spengler and Frobenius and was destined to see the adoption of this 'philosophical innovation' for which the morphological method would form the basis? The series of historical, political and intellectual events, between the end of the First World War and the Second, seems to have been one of the possible developments, though it was certainly different from what these thinkers could have imagined.

Cultural morphology's orientation has been labelled 'reactionary' by its critics. Here we shall simply mention two reasons for this view. First it is indeed reactionary in the sense that it attributes logical, ontological and aesthetic preeminence to the past, as opposed to the present and the future. The only future worth experiencing would be one, Frobenius

and Kerényi seem to be saying, which was capable of retrieving the spontaneous, involuntary faculty of reactualizing an unfolding stage of creative vigour, a stage of pure 'expressivity' stemming from the mimetic identification of the human soul with the world and its phenomena. This strand of thought is also reactionary for a second reason. According to some of those who spoke for cultural morphology, this initial state, when consciousness and the world are reflected in one another, is not finally over. Perhaps it could still be brought back. Not by people of 'goodwill' – which would imply that they would perform conscious intentional acts, producing 'factuality' – but by those who are 'capable of feeling primordial wonder', able to give in to 'reality' and 'destiny' rather than produce 'facts'.

In 1933 Frobenius wrote that, to 're-learn the feeling of *life*' typical of other periods or other cultures, 'no people is as well qualified as the German people'. The defeat suffered fifteen years earlier was the defeat of rational, realist, material values, 'completely foreign to our mentality'. But now that German civilization had just experienced 'an emotion matching its internal essence', 'German feeling' was made 'pure' again, so that now, leaving aside foreign costumes, 'we can play the part that was written for us'. Retrospectively these words, which were written at the moment when another 'Reich', also called the third, was coming into being, look to us like heavy clouds in a sky whose storms Frobenius does not appear to have forecast – and they were about to break that very evening.⁵⁵

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Notes

1. Judith Schlanger (1971), *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (Paris, Vrin), 2nd edition, L'Harmattan 1995, pp. 66–67.
2. The school founded by Aby Warburg is situated in this same environment; characterized by a method which relies on the use of figurative artefacts as historical sources, it aims to establish an art history leading to a *Kulturwissenschaft* of the type imagined by Burckhardt.
3. Among his works the following have been translated into French: *La civilisation africaine* (1933) (French translation Paris, Gallimard 1952; Rocher 1987); *La mythologie de l'Atlantide* (Paris, Payot 1940; Rocher 1993); *Le destin des civilisations* (Paris, Gallimard 1940); *Peuples et sociétés traditionnelles du Nord Cameroun* (Stuttgart, F. Steiner 1987).
4. *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur* (Stuttgart, Schröder 1952) and *Mythes et cultes chez les peuples primitifs* (French translation, Paris, Payot 1954).
5. Zurich 1941 (French translation, Paris, Payot 1953).
6. Munich/Vienna, Langen/Müller 1985.
7. This explains the emphasis Kerényi placed on what he called the 'style' running through a civilization, its religion and its art. For him, 'the style is what remains constant when other things change. That is why everything that perishes takes on, through style, an imperishable significance.' *Umgang mit göttlichen Wesen und Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos*, *op. cit.* Italian translation: *Il rapporto con il divino* (Turin, Einaudi 1991), pp. 67–68. Compare Jensen's idea that every civilization is 'unicum' (A. Jensen, *Mythes et cultes chez les peuples primitifs*, *op. cit.*, p. 46).
8. For example, Frobenius (1933) takes as an epigraph a quotation from Wölfflin: 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', *La civilisation africaine* (French translation, Paris, Éditions du Rocher 1987, p. 23) and Jensen stresses the need to refocus cultural analysis on the problem of meaning (*op. cit.* 1954, pp. 46–51).
9. We shall restrict our reference to Irrationalism to one particular aspect, viz. what G. Lukács calls 'the philosophy of life', mentioning especially those writers between 1800 and 1900 who theorized the

- immediateness of life as the access route to 'true reality', parting company with the methods of analytical thought and the causal logic that directs the scientific approach.
10. On this notion of 'existential shock', cf. in particular A. Jensen (1954), p. 73. We may understand this as an experience ranging from the mystical or aesthetic (in any case a-logical) perception of a cosmic order to the representation of this reality in myths, cults and artistic forms.
 11. J.G. Herder (1773), *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*; French translation, *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris, Aubier 1964) pp. 167–173.
 12. On this subject, the debate between him and Winckelmann (who considered Greece to be the model for the whole of Antiquity) is very significant. In Herder's view, even Greek art and literature were 'national'. Nevertheless he thought that Greece was a model of that youth or primitive character that was a harmonious synthesis of primitivism and self-fulfilment. The fact that we already find reaching its high point in Herder the Greek theme of the myth of Nemesis striking with excessive force is very interesting. The same theme was to play a fundamental part in Frobenius's and Kerényi's as well as Spengler's thought.
 13. K. Kerényi links the notion of *archetypos*, archetype, prototype, etc. with this idea of immediateness. Cf. in particular *op. cit.* (1985), French translation *cit.* (1991), p. 128.
 14. For a grand description of the origins of civilizations, the development of cultures and their cycles, etc., cf. in particular K. Kerényi (1941) *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie* (1941); French translation *Introduction à l'essence de la mythologie* (Paris, Payot 1953), pp. 38–39. Cf. also L. Frobenius (1940), *Le destin des civilisations* (Paris, Gallimard), pp. 81–82, referred to in *Leo Frobenius 1873–1973. Une anthologie*, Preface by Leopold Sédar Senghor (1973) (Wiesbaden, Steiner), pp. 19–63.
 15. Here we recall Herder's famous reference to the chain of being, from stone to crystal, from crystal to metals, etc., up to human beings, where the chain stops: cf. *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1783); French translation *Idées pour la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité* (Paris, Aubier 1962), p. 81. We find the same notion taken up by Franz Boas, who grew up in the same intellectual climate that gave rise to the German historico-cultural school and so to historical morphology, but also more generally by American cultural anthropology, for which culture is understood as a bio-psychic whole. Cf. Marvin Harris (1969), *The Rise of Anthropological Theory. A History of Theories of Culture* (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell), especially chapters ix ('Historical peculiarity: Franz Boas') and x ('Around Boas'). Cf. also George Stocking (1968), *Race, Culture and Evolution* (Chicago, Free Press), and especially chapter vii 'From physics to ethnology'.
 16. Kerényi wrote that it was as if in human plasma there was already 'a spiritual element, the imperiousness of the spiritual', an element that he said corresponded to the Paideuma as Frobenius understood it. Cf. in particular Kerényi (1953), *op. cit.*, p. 37.
 17. On this anti-reductionist principle, also understood as critical of a certain form of evolutionism, cf. Kerényi (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 22–25.
 18. In this connection we recall A.W. Schlegel, who contrasted the clock, which is activated by a mechanism foreign to itself, with the solar system, which, like the true work of art, is activated by a force that is of its very nature. Cf. for this passage *L'absolu littéraire* (Paris, Seuil 1978), pp. 346–347.
 19. On the antagonism between the concept of 'civilization' and that of 'culture' in European nineteenth-century culture, and on the use of this antithesis in the process of the construction of German cultural identity, cf. N. Elias (1973), *La civilisation des moeurs* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy); J. Strabonski (1983), 'Le mot civilisation', in *Le temps de la réflexion*, n. 4, pp. 13–51; L. Dumont (1991), *L'idéologie allemande* (Paris, Seuil); E. Terray (1994), *Une passion allemande* (Paris, Seuil).
 20. German historical ethnology, born in reaction to evolutionism's generalizing models, sought out the individuality of a culture by first situating it geographically, then possibly moving its boundaries outwards as research uncovered the extent in space of certain significant elements of the culture. The kind of cultural phenomena noted in this work of individuation included (in particular in F. Ratzel's work) craft techniques, the shapes of utensils, the materials used, etc. So German ethnology came to be situated more and more explicitly at the culturalist end of spectrum: Ratzel's *Völkerkreise* (ethnic circles) led on to the *Kulturkreise* (culture circles) theorized by Bernhard Ankermann (1859–1915) and Fritz Graebner (1887–1934). However, a split occurred within this strand where in 1898 Frobenius, then 25, had been the originator of the theory of cultural cycles (a theory that was finally systematized in 1904 by Ankermann and Graebner). Frobenius gradually distanced himself from the historico-cultural school, criticizing its methods for being too mecha-

- nistic, and founded his own school in Frankfurt. It aimed to concentrate in particular on the spiritual aspects of culture, thus linking with the Romantic Germanic tradition whose spokesman had been the German F. Max-Müller in the field of the comparative history of religions. Cf. Dario Sabbatucci (1991), *Sommario di Storia delle religioni* (Rome, Il Bagatto), pp. 98–100.
21. His arguments are very similar to Cuvier's and Goethe's morphologico-naturalist discourse, in particular in the latter's *The Metamorphosis of Animals*. Cf. 'Der Ursprung der afrikanerischen Kulturen', in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, XXXVII (1898), pp. 88–89. A systematic account of the debate between L. Frobenius and his disciples in Graebner and Ankermann's historico-cultural school, as well as in Father Wilhelm Schmidt's in Vienna, can be found in Adolf Jensen's book *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur* (Stuttgart, 1948). The break with the theory of cultural cycles was to become open in an article by Frobenius himself in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* XXXVII, p. 88, where he states: 'I admit that today this work partly causes me a certain unease; it contains many errors, and the best thing would be to have the courage to acknowledge them oneself: *Pater peccavi*.'
 22. This direction had two consequences. On the one hand, in Germany, the true subject of ethnological research became identified with *Kultur* as a historical way of being a particular ethnic group. Thus its problematic developed in perfect harmony with that of the historical sciences. On the other hand, by placing its methods among the historical sciences – and by claiming for these sciences a different status from the natural sciences – from the outset German ethnology rejected evolutionist anthropology's typology relating to the evolutionary phases of a unique culture, defending the idea of the irreducible variety of historical cultures.
 23. First everything was sacred, then 'at a mad pace we went down an increasingly profane road': Leo Frobenius (1933), *op. cit.*, French translation (1987), pp. 59–60. Cf. also *Le destin des civilisations*, *op. cit.*, note 15, p. 82. A. Jensen expresses similar sentiments. Cf. in particular *Mythos und Kult bei Naturvölkern* (Wiesbaden, 1951), p. 70.
 24. 'My science of civilization holds that the ongoing development of human civilization is a third kingdom (Reich). Civilization is organic, essence, language and history.' In *La civilisation africaine* (Paris, Éditions du Rocher 1987), p. 37.
 25. Thus a writer such as E. Hahn could declare (in *Demeter und Bubo*, Leipzig 1897 – but also in *Die Entstehung der Pflugkultur*, Heidelberg 1909, pp. 182–185, and in *Von der Hacke zum Pflug*, Leipzig 1919, pp. 77–80) that the origin of technical and economic expressions was religious, and that the use of tools and inventions for utilitarian or profane purposes merely attested to a stage that was historically secondary, eventually derived from an initial stage when rite and myth ruled the life of human societies.
 26. It could be said that this concept expresses culture in its potential state. The relationship between the products of culture and the *paideuma*, as Frobenius conceived it, could be transposed into the opposition between noumen and phenomenon or potential and actual. Cf. for example Leo Frobenius, *Paideuma*, no. 1 (Frankfurt), p. 158, cited also in K. Kerényi and C.G. Jung (1941), *Introduction to the Essence of Mythology*, in collaboration with C.G. Jung, French translation by Payot 1993, p. 7, note.
 27. The science of religions itself aims to return to the original 'relationship' (*Umgang*) with the divine, based on an lived experience rather than an intellectual attitude. Cf. in particular K. Kerényi (1985, *op. cit.*, Italian translation 1991, *cit.*, p. 28.
 28. Cf. a sample list in 'Présentation' from Danièle Cohn (1993) to *Écrits d'esthétique* (Paris, Éditions du Cerf), pp. 7–8.
 29. On Karl Philipp Moritz's systematization of Romantic aesthetics, see his *Le concept d'achevé en soi et autres écrits (1785–1793)*, introduction by P. Beck (Paris, PUF 1995). Cf. also the work of T. Todorov, who introduced this insufficiently known writer to a French audience before his work was translated from German; see particularly chapter vi ('La crise romantique') in Todorov's book (1977) *Théories du symbole* (Paris, Seuil).
 30. K.P. Moritz (1785), *Sur le concept d'achevé en soi*, in *op. cit.* (1995), note 26, p. 83.
 31. K.P. Moritz (1788), *Sur l'imitation formatrice du beau*, in *op. cit.* (1995), note 26, p. 157.
 32. For this notion of imitation and 'creative formation' in Moritz, see in particular *ibid.*, p. 149.
 33. This explains the importance of what he calls 'first moment of welling up'. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 159.
 34. K.P. Moritz (1785), *Sur le concept d'achevé en soi*, in *op. cit.* (1995), p. 84, where he also elaborates on what he understands by internal and external purpose.

35. K.P. Moritz (1788), *La signature du beau*, in *op. cit.* (1995), note 26, p. 177.
36. On this topic, see characteristic statements in Danièle Cohn (1993), *op. cit.*, note 25, p. 23.
37. Dilthey says that several characteristic signs, several parts or functions are interconnected in this 'type'. These features, which together form the 'type', are in a reciprocal relationship with each other such that the presence of the one implies the presence of the other, and variations of the one imply variations of the other. By the same author, cf. *Écrits d'esthétique* (cited in note 25), p. 45. See also, by the same author, *Théorie des conceptions du monde* (Paris, PUF 1946), in particular the chapter: *L'art, la religion et la philosophie*.
38. W. Dilthey (1942), *Introduction à l'étude des sciences humaines* (Paris, PUF), pp. 25–28.
39. Goethe, in a letter to Eckermann, 30 March 1831, quoted in W. Dilthey (1993), *op. cit.*, note 25, p. 18.
40. W. Dilthey (1993), *op. cit.*, note 25, p. 54.
41. I. Kant (1789), *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgement*, French translation (Paris, Vrin 1997), pp. 61–63.
42. I. Kant (1790), *Critique of Judgement*, French translation (Paris, Vrin 1993), p. 297.
43. In emphasizing the affinity between his views and Kant's, set out in the *Critique of Judgement*, Goethe even states: 'I found my most contradictory interests coming together and meeting, the products of art treated in the same way as the products of nature.' In *Werke: Kommentare. Register*, 13 (Hamburg 1981), p. 27. Cf. also Ernst Cassirer, *Goethe und die Kantische Philosophie* (French translation, 'Goethe et la philosophie kantienne' in *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* (Paris, Belin 1991), pp. 98–100) as well as Jean Lacoste (1997), *Goethe, Science et philosophie* (Paris, PUF), p. 218, and Danièle Cohn (1999), *La lyre d'Orphée* (Paris, Flammarion).
44. I. Kant (1790), *Critique of Judgement*, French translation (Paris, Vrin 1995? See 41), p. 301.
45. Oswald Spengler refers to a quite characteristic passage in a statement Goethe addressed to Eckermann concerning the action of the divinity in the 'living' but not in the 'dead' (quoted in *Le déclin de l'Occident*, French translation (Paris, Gallimard 1976), p. 61).
46. The revival of interest in morphology shown in recent years by history and the epistemology of the human sciences has uncovered a series of interesting links, particularly in anthropology and sociology, between these fields and the tradition of idealist morphology. On this topic, cf. C. Severi (1988), 'Structure et forme originaires', in *Les idées de l'anthropologie* (Paris, Armand Colin), pp. 117–150, and J. Petitot (1999), 'La généologie morphologique', in *Critique*, no. 620–621 devoted to Claude Lévi-Strauss, January–February, pp. 97–122.
47. Goethe said that biology would not be a true science if it could not infer the general from particular. On this precise point, cf. Ernst Cassirer (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 153. Cf. also Jean Lacoste (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 15–87.
48. Cf. 'Principles of Philosophy discussed in March 1830 at the Royal Academy of Sciences', in *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, Weimar edition, vol. VII, pp. 189 *et seq.*
49. J.W. Goethe (1887–1919), *Die Skelette der Nagetiere*, in *Wissenschaftliche Schriften*, VII (Weimar), p. 253.
50. J.G. Herder (1774), *op. cit.*, Italian translation *Ancora una filosofia della storia per l'educazione dell'umanità* (Turin, Einaudi 1981), p. 38.
51. In this type of relationship to knowledge, neither deduction nor induction is involved, since the cognitive ideal depends first of all on intuition. Cf. in particular 'Zur Farbenlehre' (historical section), in *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (Weimar 1887–1919), vol. III, p. 236. It is interesting to note the resemblance between these ideas, later taken up by Dilthey himself in connection with the historical process, and the arguments used in anthropology by C. Geertz to define the concept of 'dense description'.
52. Referring to this concept, which is used by Goethe in relation to vegetable forms, Judith Schlanger (1995) says this about O. Spengler's morphological approach (but what she says could be applied equally to all those speaking for cultural morphology): 'Spengler sees in peoples and national styles, not the actors but products of culture, replacing the pathos of a people with the pathos of a culture. Culture is the primary phenomenon [. . .] it is an *Urphänomen*, in the sense in which Goethe's philosophy of nature intended that concept.' *Op. cit.*, p. 160.
53. O. Spengler (1917), *Le déclin de l'Occident*, French translation (Paris, Gallimard 1976), pp. 35–38.
54. Thus Spengler felt justified in stating: 'All methods of understanding the universe can in the final analysis be called "morphological"', and he looked forward to the advent, in the human sciences, of a 'scientifically regulated physiognomy', cf. *ibid.*, pp. 16 and 108. Cf. also note 59, p. 19, on what he expected from future historical research.
55. L. Frobenius (1933), *op. cit.*, note 4, p. 32.