

# PETER BURKE

Knowledge, Culture  
and Society



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and Society



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***Knowledge, culture and society***

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# PREFACE

During the Warring States period in China, Chuang Tzu was summoned by a king to paint a crab. In order to accomplish such an enterprise, he requested from the monarch time, housing, food and servants for five years. However, as time passed, there wasn't even a sketch of the drawing, and Chuang Tzu still required five more years of royal subsidies to complete his project. Finally, the king questioned the painter, who, consumed by time and approaching his death, gave him the most perfect and beautiful drawing ever seen on earth.

Even if the fable alludes to a critical reflection about highly complex art, it turns out to be perfect for the work of human, social and economic sciences in general. How is knowledge measured? How long does it take us to reflect on something and how long to express our thoughts? Perhaps it takes some longer than others, but the difference doesn't allow us to qualify anyone as better or worse, nor to catalogue those for whom reading takes longer, or whose process takes more time as less intelligent.

Such is the dilemma that the human, social and economic sciences go through, since they face the challenge of understanding complex processes when confronting the urgency of standards, measurements and forms of qualitative and quantitative evaluation that

respond to notions of utility, productivity and viability, defined within social, cultural and political realities discordant with those models.

In its 40 years of existence, thought, and creation, the Faculty of Human and Economical Sciences (FCHE) decided to take a fundamental academic event as a stepping stone: an event rooted in the passion for history, political and human sciences of one of the most influential masters of contemporary history, whose life is an example of commitment to questioning and re-thinking the world. Professor Peter Burke was not only an obvious, but also a necessary choice to attract our attention as an academic community, to make us turn to ourselves and think about what we do, how we do it and how we teach others to do it.

Professor Peter Burke not only has authored circa 372 publications, among books, chapters of books and published articles, but his work has also been translated into 36 languages, positioning him as one of the principal and most influential British historians of our time. He is an exponent of new cultural history and his contributions have allowed the comprehension of different perspectives about the Renaissance and Modern History.

During Professor Burke's stay in Medellín in 2015, the event "Peter Burke, Contextos del Conocimiento" took place: a space of reflection, not only about the History of Knowledge, but also about Sociology, Anthropology, and Geopolitics of Knowledge. He imparted the inaugural lecture to the Faculty's postgraduate department, entitled "*¿Más allá de la Nueva Historia Cultural?*" (Beyond New Cultural History?); thus, opening a space for reflection about social and human sciences in the contemporary world for the new master and doctoral students.

The current book: *Peter Burke. Knowledge, Culture, and Society*, compiles a series of conferences given by



Peter Burke during his visit to Medellín, but also includes some unpublished works. It constitutes the first publication in English by the Editorial Center of the Faculty, aimed at the internationalization of our programs and to support the acquisition of a second language. It is also one of three publications commemorating the FCHE's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: the historical review *40 Años Creciendo, Escribiendo y Publicando*, the *Historia de la Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Económicas (1975-2015)*, and now, this academic jewel that encourages the reflection upon our disciplines and the sources that support us as academics and researchers.

The support of the Campus Vice Principal, Professor Dr. John Willian Branch Bedoya, and the Academic Director, Professor Dra. Diana Luz Ceballos, was essential to accomplish both the event and the publishing of this book, and we thank them deeply. Likewise, we express our most sincere thanks to the Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín, to its then director, Gloria Inés Palomino, and to its *comunicaciones y extensión* team, for always supporting our academic projects, which benefit the creation and spread of knowledge in the city.

I hope that *Peter Burke. Knowledge, Culture, and Society* provides the tools for an interdisciplinary discussion about knowledge in the social and human sciences today, as well as important considerations about the research and methodological challenges posed to us every day.

Yobenj Aucardo Chicangana-Bayona  
Decano

# SYMBOLISM AND KNOWLEDGE: THE CULTURE CIRCUIT<sup>1</sup>

*Diana L. Ceballos Gómez*<sup>2</sup>

1.

Professor Burke's work has left a mark on many academics' research work in the world and in our Latin-American academic institutes, and although I won't speak directly about his important and recognized work, it will of course be implicitly present in this text, because it was fundamental in my doctoral training, when, searching for literature about the Modern Age in the University of Tübingen's library, I found Professor Burke's writings and, especially, three books that were closely related to my research: *Popular Culture in Modern Europe*, *Reden und Schweigen* (Speaking and Silence) and *Küchenlatein* (Kitchen Latin).<sup>3</sup> In them, Burke reflects on the role of language and the symbolic universe in culture and, therefore, in historical and cultural analysis<sup>4</sup>.

When completing my history studies at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in the late 80s and early 90s, I only had the chance to study some of his texts in a fragmentary way; back then, the circulation of books and texts was restricted (even more so in a country like

Colombia), and paper was the only available medium, implying high costs, imports or subscriptions to specialized journals, which our universities couldn't afford. Today, things have changed a lot, as has the research landscape in our country, and, thanks to new technologies, it's possible to access, expeditiously and at a lower cost - or even at no cost - an entire treasure of knowledge,<sup>5</sup> due to policies of open access and virtual archives, which have been built all around the world, and to the increased use of TICs in our daily life, as Professor Burke has shown in works such as *A Social History of Knowledge. I: From Gutenberg to Diderot*, and *A Social History of Knowledge. II: From the Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia*.<sup>6</sup>

And here we arrive at the problem that brings us together in this text: the production of knowledge, which is an intrinsic part of the culture circuit and an essential part of what defines us as a species. I understand by knowledge the whole compound of observations, descriptions, representations, practices, rationalizations, procedures, conducts, discourses, institutionalizations, and *know-how*, by which we humans classify the lived experience and build our world: what we call "reality".

As Ernst Cassirer showed in his 1932 book *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*,<sup>7</sup> starting with the works of biologist and pioneer in ethology Johann von Uexküll, all animal species are adapted to and coordinated with their environment. They possess a "receptive" system that responds to external stimuli, and an "effector" system that reacts to the stimulus, meaning that there's a direct relationship between the animal and the sensory world. However, there is certain reversal of this natural order among humans, a new quality constituted in the distinctive feature of a human being's life: its symbolic ability. That's why the functional circle of humans is quantitatively wider

(from the biological point of view, the use of the hand and the acquisition of manual skills have been linked to the development of the brain<sup>8</sup>), in such a way that Cassirer defines humans as *symbolic animals*.

Already in 1978 and from Cognitive Anthropology, Dan Sperber, in his book *Le Symbolisme en général*, had shown how humans are only equipped “with a general symbolic dispositive and learning abilities”, settling once and for all the dispute held throughout the process that, beginning in the Enlightenment, classified and ranked world populations and their cultures as superior or inferior according to their degree of “civilization” or “progress”; a dispute later deepened by evolutionist theories, especially in Anthropology and History. It was a long process, leading to the defeat of fake postures and prejudices rooted in scientific circles, in which previous academic research was fundamental: the one done by men as important as Gustav Klemm (illustrious unknown man), Franz Boas and Edward Evans-Pritchard, in the first discipline, or by Karl Lamprecht and Johan Huizinga,<sup>9</sup> in the second.

This strategy consists [... says Sperber] of looking for the most systematic and coherent treatment of the diverse information they are confronted with. In this hypothesis, diversity of beliefs, rites, etc., and their repetition, far from being absurd or contingent, appears as necessary, because it is the only thing that enables, given the absence of explicit instructions or innate schemes, the understanding of how the experience of cultural symbolism can lead, at least partially, to a common orientation of the members of a certain society. If such common orientation didn't exist, the existence of cultural symbolism itself would remain incomprehensible.<sup>10</sup>

Within its production circuit (creation, exchange,<sup>11</sup> transformation<sup>12</sup>), each culture constitutes different symbolic systems or cognitive apparatus,<sup>13</sup> meaning that each culture has different rationalities and ways of

thinking, diverse ways of operating in the world and different forms of classification, leading in turn to different ways of processing events in its surroundings by means of diverse mechanisms, which end up constituting knowledge of all kinds, that is, knowledge about the world, such as cooking, extracting the poison from mandioca before its consumption, weaving and dying textiles, writing a penal code, producing scientific knowledge or medical/magical wisdom as complex as shamanism.<sup>14</sup>

It is through this knowledge and the set of practices and representations that constitute culture, that the world and people around us are classified, distinguished, interpreted and characterized; by these means, we recognize others and are, in turn, recognized. Such knowledge is constituted by direct observation of experience, prejudices,<sup>15</sup> discourses,<sup>16</sup> practices and representations of culture, knowledge passed through generations and supported by common sense –what Bourdieu called practical sense. Constitution of knowledge is always implied in the culture circuit, from complex or sophisticated knowledge to practices that may seem simple or unnecessary, like the use of the fork.<sup>17</sup>

When we speak of symbolism, we speak of an autonomous cognitive dispositive that participates in the constitution of knowledge (of all kinds) and in memory functioning. It is this human learning ability that determines cultural variability. Sperber classifies cultural knowledge in three types:

1. Explicit knowledge: the one explicitly imparted.
2. Tacit knowledge:
  - a. It can never be acquired by a simple register;
  - b. It must be reconstructed by each individual;



- c. It is direct proof of specific learning abilities, of a qualitatively determined creative competence.
- 3. Implicit and unconscious knowledge: when those who hold tacit knowledge are able to make it explicit.

On this path, semantic knowledge refers to categories and can be expressed through a set of analytical propositions, while encyclopaedic knowledge is concerned with the world and expressed through a set of synthetic propositions (beliefs belong to this type), and that's why causal knowledge is always *a posteriori* and why the concept of truth varies not only from one culture to another but also within the same culture.<sup>18</sup>

In order to study tacit knowledge, intuition is fundamental. We're talking about judgements that members of a cultural group explain systematically without developing the argument upon which they rely. For instance, when a society considers something insulting but cannot entirely define the criteria upon which such judgement relies (and here we could resort to the examples presented by Clifford Geertz about winking in his text "Thick Description"<sup>19</sup>). Explicit cultural knowledge, such as proverbs, is the object of tacit underlying knowledge: proverbs are part of a general implicit gloss and, at the same time, part of some unconscious knowledge that determines the precise conditions for their appropriate use and the symbolic nuances that should be added to their interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

Symbolism is therefore exemplary, since its implicit forms are unintelligible by themselves and their study has always assumed the existence of underlying tacit knowledge. Common sense could then be understood, according to Pierre Bourdieu, as a type of collective knowledge with a practical character: in the midst of the

dispute to classify reality - with the pretension to gain a monopoly over order and nomination - categories are established through the construction of representations; categories that are validated when they become widely accepted by means of a naturalization process of the dominant order and its relationships.<sup>21</sup>

A “cultural system”, as defined by Clifford Geertz,<sup>22</sup> predisposes toward certain interpretations of reality and determined cultural behaviours, and establishes shared significances. Common sense is constituted through learning processes in childhood, through observation, experiences of the world, situations lived collectively in society, normative social precepts and through institutions and instituted performative practices of behaviour, practices, discourses, representations..., that is, performances of reality. Common sense also participates, as a good number of studies have already shown, in the construction of western knowledge, of the so called scientific knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Imperfect Garden*,<sup>24</sup> Todorov splits the ways of thinking that arrived with what he calls the modern man from Enlightenment into four families: conservatives, scientists, individualists and humanists. We are interested here in the scientist family, adhered to a deterministic vision of the world, that increased during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when three forms of causality and determinism consolidated: social and historical; biological, and psychic and individual;<sup>25</sup> forms of thought that, although still part of our interpretative background, could be traced back to Greek philosophy and Christian religion. For them, willpower is void “because nature (or history) has decided everything for us”. “Omnipresent, causality is also the same everywhere: scientificism is a universalism” that recognizes the differences arising from the

contingences of facts, since "... the inexorable concatenation of causes and effects can be known in an exhaustive manner, and modern science constitutes the real path of such knowledge... it opposes the passive acceptance of the world as it is".<sup>26</sup>

That's why this type of knowledge can conceive a better reality, adapted to our needs (progress):

[...] the one who has penetrated the secret of plants can produce new plants, more fertile and nutritive; the one who has understood natural selection can institute artificial selection. [...] Knowledge of what exists leads to technique, which enables the fabrication of an improved existent.

[... But] what is a *better* animal or plant species? How to judge a landscape *superior* to another? By which criteria do we decide which political regime would be *preferable* to the existing one? [...]. Scientificism consists, effectively, in founding, on top of what we believe to be the results of science, a form of ethics and politics. In other words, science, or what is perceived as such, stops being simple knowledge about the existing world to become a generator of values, in the same way as a religion; it can, therefore, guide political and moral actions.<sup>27</sup>

Its results are universal, valid for all, since they determine the "objective laws of the real" that can be put in place by its supporters to guide the world at their will. That is, extending Todorov's reflections a bit more, what all forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism have done all around the world to a certain extent since the Modern Age.

We have, then, a plurality of rationalities, logics, ways of thinking and living the world and the experience that includes all the *other*-rationalities unrecognized by a part of western university knowledge and systemized in a type of knowledge, that I would define as a diverse cognitive apparatus composed of parts of varied species, such as representations, practices, observations about the world, ways of acting and of know-how, discourses, institutions..., that come into play in particular cultures. That's why these

reflections become more pertinent today, when transnational population migrations confront us with a new encounter of worlds – an uneven encounter of knowledge and experiences of life and the world<sup>28</sup> – just like in the early Modern Age, when, as today, there were misunderstandings, disagreements and fear towards the *other-one*.<sup>29</sup>

And it's here where, as I see it, cultural analysis<sup>30</sup> turns out to be productive for the study of knowledge and its production, beyond discussions of whether we should conduct an internalist or an externalist history of science, and of whether epistemology, philosophy, history or sociology are more convenient; a debate, I consider, we should have already left behind. German cultural critique, as we could name it, had already used this type of analysis to account for thought phenomena. It is sufficient to mention three relevant cases, situated at the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Cassirer and Karl Mannheim. All three contributed to establishing the foundations of the forthcoming analysis of the then called Human Sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), for which Dilthey established epistemological principles, besides laying out important stepping stones for contemporary hermeneutics.<sup>31</sup>

We could say that reflections on culture have taken place within two great traditions that, although not unique, are the most outstanding and, more importantly, most sustained over time, and from which a large part of current studies are derived: the tradition of studies, history, philosophy and sociology of culture, and the German cultural critique (including the *Volkskunde*), which can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the so-called cultural and social anthropology, with all its derivatives.

As for the first tradition,<sup>32</sup> it's important to emphasize that the terms "cultural studies" and "cultural history", "*Volk*" (people, folk, nation) and "popular", as well as these perspectives, were already being used in the German academic field during the transition from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century by men as important as Johan Christoph Adelung, with his *Versuch einer Geschichte der Kultur des Menschlichen Geschlechts* ("Essay in a history of the culture of the human race", Leipzig 1782);<sup>33</sup> Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and his *General History of Culture and Literature of the New Europe* (1796-9),<sup>34</sup> and of Johann Gottfried von Herder, Kant's student, whose work lies at the foundation of modern culture studies. In this sense, his most important work was *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* ("Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind", Riga 1784-1791).

Adelung introduced the term "cultural history" to the German language; the term "culture" had been settling on during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but only with Herder can it be said that the concept of culture has the implications that it has today. As Isaiah Berlin ascertained, Herder didn't share the theory of progress; on the contrary, he thought about and emphasized diversity, particularity, and incomparability of cultures; he was against classifying people by race (and against the consequent racism it introduced), against colonialism and slavery. To this we must add the role he assigned to each culture's own historicity, and the role of language, which granted each of them a unique quality. He highlighted the importance of objective as well as subjective aspects of culture. For him, culture is composed of creative processes as much as of objects. Science, technique, education, training (*Bildung*), arts, language, writing, religion, customs, rules and political, economic and judicial systems, are all part of culture.<sup>35</sup> Herder's thought



lies at the foundation of later works: those by Gustav Klemm, Jacob Burckhardt, Wilhelm Dilthey... or those by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Friedrich Hegel and many others, and, partly, of all of our works.

Even if there isn't a continuity thread, this tradition was carried on throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Jacob Burckhardt and Karl Lamprecht, among others, and during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Johan Huizinga, who gained his doctorate in Germany, where he participated in an exchange with the latter (by then a Professor in Leipzig)<sup>36</sup> and with Henri Pirenne, who completed his doctorate alongside the former. We might dare to say that, at the beginning of History, as an academic discipline, cultural history had a prominent presence, also if we think about a literate like Voltaire, who, despite not using the term culture, did refer to the human "spirit" and dedicated a text to manners (*Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* [1756]). We can't forget that History is the discipline chosen by the Enlightenment to be the reasoned philosophical science that will account for the progress of the spirit of nations<sup>37</sup> or, if we think, later, about cultural analysis among historians such as Marc Bloch (*The Magic-Working Kings*) and even Lucien Febvre (his works about Rabelais, Luther and Erasmus...).

As for the second tradition, I would like to briefly emphasize three moments and two authors, important for the recognition of knowledge and, in general, of cultures of subordinate groups and non-Western nations. The first is Gustav Friedrich Klemm, who was credited by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* with the development of the "culture" concept; a definition that was later adopted by Edward Burnett Tylor, and that, with time, was established as canonical for decades. He was also recognized for his ethnographic collection, which became a model to others.<sup>38</sup>

The second, a German immigrant to the United States, Franz Boas, considered one of the pillars of American Cultural Anthropology, established in 1920 a set of basic principles that confronted evolutionist interpretations and the hierarchical organization of cultures: cultural aspects of human behaviour and manners are acquired by learning, through unconscious processes; all cultures have their own development and history, which respond to their own priorities and needs, so none of them is better, nor more or less primitive than any other and, consequently, each culture must be interpreted by analysing its internal elements; an idea directly against evolutionist stances,<sup>39</sup> still in vogue today. About the third, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, we will make a brief mention further on.

Starting from this historic-genealogical frame, sketched in a somewhat coarse way, I understand cultural history as a perspective of analysis concerned with the logics and rationalities that guide society, governments, politics, the economy, people's actions and their ideas about the world; a perspective that also brings human conflicts to the centre, and not only meaning, as more culturalist tendencies have done by using cultural analysis in various disciplines, forgetting the necessary anchoring in society that every analysis dealing with human societies must retain.<sup>40</sup> Cultural practices, as well as representations and knowledge emanating from them, are socially differentiated and, in turn, influence and transform the surroundings in which they are produced, become appropriated and start circulating (culture circuit = production, circulation and appropriation, which, by the way, must be unravelled during the research process).

As Pierre Bourdieu showed in *Practical Reason*, his theory of action,<sup>41</sup> social agents act and are equipped with a practical sense, an acquired system of perceptual

preferences, as well as with cognitive structures typical of each culture and/or particular human group. So, it's therefore possible and necessary to reveal what he calls "the intrinsic dynamic of practices", that is, translated into my own words, the logic, strategies and rationalities with which social relationships are weaved and produced, including conflicts, of course, since social relationships are relationships of symbolic force, which may or may not be shaped as relationships of physical force. Karl Marx (and Max Weber of course) had already emphasized this important part of domination mechanisms: symbolic domination<sup>42</sup>, which became explicit in such difficult life conditions by Antonio Gramsci in his *Jail Notebooks*: cultural hegemony, hegemonic block, subordinate classes... On the other hand, Georg Simmel showed us (1904), with midday clarity, that conflict lies at the centre of all human relationships and is, most of the time, a constructive force<sup>43</sup>; in the same way, Italian Microhistory brought the role of conflict to the centre of its concerns, along with the role of different perceptions and appropriations of the social world by diverse groups,<sup>44</sup> against generalisations established by the notion of mentality.

The West has set itself up as the *norm* of knowledge, and its wise men, whom we call *scientists*, used for decades, under the shadow of colonial expansion, a censorial right to qualify, classify, and revile *other*-cultures and their knowledge; *exotic* cultures with which disciplines like Anthropology and the History of Premodern Cultures have dealt, as they have with the subordinate knowledge of the West itself, offspring of the same societies...This is not new. Michelet himself had brought attention to that fact in his well-known book *The Witch*, where he ascertained that witch hunting had taken place, partly, to deprive women of their traditional medical-healing knowledge, which he

characterized as feminine, and T.S. Elliot, when analysing the self-centredness of culture, also wondered about how to assume the conflict that ensues in the face of diversity.<sup>45</sup>

This rejection or undermining is a product of the Enlightenment. We can't even imagine how enlightened we are, how close we still are to Diderot, D'Alembert or Kant... I invite you to read the enjoyable book of Tzvetan Todorov about the Enlightenment, written for a wide audience, in which he shows how we are still enlightened: *The Spirit of the Enlightenment*.<sup>46</sup> Since, as Adorno and Horkheimer wrote in 1944, in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*:<sup>47</sup> the strategy of reason is, already from the *Odyssey's* logos, in a veiled or explicit way, a structure of domination.

This structure has been applied for centuries, in many parts of the world and with diverse strategies (territorial, nationalist, economic, etc.), through colonialism, a "global shared experience" (Jürgen Habermas), which has been strong during processes of knowledge domination (colonialism of knowledge) and of global neo-colonialisms in our contemporary consumer societies, which also exercise domination through knowledge and its transmission media (mass media, web, ...) in the form of already-globalised new colonialisms. And, during these domination processes, great treasures have been lost, especially for traditional cultures.<sup>48</sup>

2.

Since magical knowledge and traditional medicine, a kind of knowledge unrecognized and disqualified by erudite and ruling groups in Europe and America, is one of my research topics, I want to show how, in the end, other types of knowledge fulfil the same order requirements as those applied to erudite academic knowledge, the offspring of

Western universities.<sup>49</sup> This task, it seems to me, is pertinent in a country of such cultural diversity, where many forms of *other*-knowledge live together, many of which, unfortunately, now begin to disappear without being fully included in our social world. And here I think again about the book on popular culture by Professor Burke, which presents a moment when, thanks to the expansion of erudite thinking, the accelerated disappearance of popular knowledge in Europe and certain places of America began.

In short, we can say: knowledge, different ways of thinking and rationalising, and the subsequent knowledge that derives from such a symbolic stream and from learning abilities (Sperber), available in each culture (Geertz), vary from one society, community, or even sociocultural group to another, and respond to a general symbolic dispositive typical of the human species (Sperber, Cassirer, Durkheim, Boas, Turner, Lévi-Strauss, Durand...). As Giovanni Levi showed, in the great book guided and compiled by Professor Burke, *Formas de hacer historia*, even within the same culture or community, symbolic structures in different social contexts produce a “multiplicity of representations that is fragmented and differentiated”,<sup>50</sup> which materializes in different practices and knowledge (magical, discursive, political, medical, economical practices....).

Magical thinking, against what has been and, surprisingly, continues to be held by some people today, is neither part of a pre-logical nor of a primitive mentality (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl), nor of inferior culture's superstitions. It is also not a first step, prior to scientific knowledge, as the fathers of anthropology –Tylor and Frazer– or a historian like Robert Mandrou, among others, claimed. It is a complete and coherent system. In its internal coherence, it postulates determinisms as well, and it demands order, but its causality principle varies, as shown in an exemplary



way by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard in *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* [1937], where he established, against the ideas of his time, the epistemological relativity of other ways of knowledge, by showing that their causality may answer to rationalities different from ours, and that they can also be logical.<sup>51</sup>

Like science, magical thinking displays a principle of internal rationalization, being therefore systematic, and like every cognitive apparatus, it pretends to classify experience and nature. It is, as Lévi-Strauss named it, a *wild way of thinking*, a science of the concrete. Henri Hubert and Marcell Mauss described magical determinism in the following way: it has rules, laws that must and can be found again, and its principal feature resides in the importance given to symbolic thinking.<sup>52</sup> A symbolic way of thinking - and here we return to what we said at the beginning (Cassirer) - that is also characteristic of cognitive apparatus like religion, art, and science, some of whose topmost examples are mathematics and geometry.

Magical acts have precise functions in social life: to produce long distance healing, disease, and fortune; to modify meteorological conditions in order to restore the order of nature when it has been compromised by an external agent; within shamanism, all practices concerning health; to establish contact with the dead, so that, with their supernatural powers, they can participate and foster the existence of the living; hexes or death by voodoo... All of them are magical acts, with precise roles within a community, that pretend to work on the world (of behaviours, feelings, or on the physical world itself) by symbolic means (at distance, voluntarily or involuntarily, with prayers, incantations, wishes, curses...), by physical means (filters, amulets...) or by a combination of both. Therefore, we are also talking about a technology, just as it