

COMMITTEE III
Forms and Symbols: The Roots of Behavior

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SYMBOLIZATION AND TRANSMUTATION

by

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One often speaks of the rediscovery of symbols by modern man ; of the reopening of a path - or of a set of paths - along which, placed at certain cross-roads, symbols seem to be asked to play the role that was long ago allotted to the statues of the god Hermes - Mercury : the role of warning, of initiating, of guiding, and of uniting what one perceived up to now as a scattering. This reappearance and this call for a reminiscence seem to me to be more especially significant and decisive as we are living , for nearly already a century , a cultural crisis with no equivalence in the past and on which depends probably the future of all the humanity. Every passing day shows us more clearly that present desorientation can also lead to an extraordinary revolution. Of course, it will depend on the meaning that we would show us able to give to all these symbolic warnings or more so that we would be able to receive from them ; on the reorientation taken by one or the other initiatic path and, most of all, behind the notion of revolution that seems yet very abstract. One only knows, for having learnt in a tragic way from the history of the two last centuries, that ^{it} could not be a simple reconduction of the idea people have had of this notion since the eighteenthth century.

Along with the certainty that every day becomes more evident, of living in the darkest period of the Kali-Yuga (I), that hope to be found of the coming Era of the "Water-bearer", announced by all the astrologers. This new Era will bring a deep mutation - even a transmutation - of our civil and religious institutions in the way of apprehending the material and mental world and, most of all, of our relationships with others and with ourselves. I am not saying that the individual must become at first the alpha and the omega of this revelation-revolution, but the present overspread state of savagery and decay shows us enough that the ignorance of oneself (or of what Jung names the Self)(2), or the knowledge of individual exclusively brought by human sciences, produces collective

uncontrolled confusions to which it seems that we can only resist by a radical change of plane, rather by the research of more sophistication in our instruments of knowledge or by the increase of our capacities. The important thing to discover is in what way this change of plane -easily assimilated to the alchemical transmutation of the notion of power - can be considered as the outcome of all process of symbolization brought to his end.

But for the philosopher formed in the occidental world or, more exactly, by the occidental rationalist ideology, the question, on the one hand, of the role of symbols in speculative thought and in action (praxis) and, on the other hand, of the possible reality of alchemical transmutation, have been approached as dangerous rocks that we have just denied or gone around or mocked about. The metaphysical and existential dualism has nourished itself from the certainty that they were two unconciliabile worlds : one, "positive", nicely backed up by the conquests of technological and scientific rationality, applied since the nineteenth century to human sciences ; the other, supposed to regroup the different paths of "creation", was charged, with no real order and no any objective results, by poetry, myths, religions... This second universe, that one has often qualified as "irrational" -which is completely wrong - offers to us a serie of variations on the nearly only theme of death and rebirth ; theme that generates a new waste investigation on the question of meaning. This question is without answer as everyone knows or sooner does't know if one tries to answer it using frames of thought that deny the question in the same time that they make the answer ineffective. The first path is the one of history, of its dramas without hope and of its conquests without future. The second path leads us to varied hermeneutics, accepted by the rationality still in power only at one condition : that they must not question the strongly historical, social and political

animal's statute of the modern man.

For sure, this dualist way of putting the problem of knowledge is no doubt deciduous in all the high standed technologies of human activity. But this dualism nevertheless continues to determine most of the collective behaviors and a great number of the ways of thinking, conscious or unconscious. Therefore, in concentrating this talk on the relation between symbolization and transmutation, I would like to try to situate myself in the heart of the problem, where the regenerative aims of all symbolic activity are rooted. And if my present questioning has to recognize a considerable debt to all the anthropological works done during the last fifty years, in the different fields of deep psychologie, compared history of religions and spiritualities...I also hope — helped by the alchemical teaching — to open up some new perspectives.

The first anthropological revolution : Why not speak in this terms as we accept with no difficulty the expression first, second, third...industrial revolution ? Since the same expression is more and more used for computer revolution which will allow us — as it would appear — to face more surely the future's shock ? My purpose is not to expose here the far origins of these revolutions, which cannot be separated from the tragical story of european thought, from the crisis of nihilism, and even from the destiny of the occidental world. But I am just trying to find and recognize the seeds of this future towards which we wish to be reorientated. Therefore, I will just like to concentrate myself on what has been the leading thought of my State's thesis that is going to be published, in which it is said that ⁱⁿ the passage through what Nietzsche named "the dark age of Europe", there is a possible turn over of signs, capable of giving birth to a day-break. The question is wether to know if these signs are by themselves symbols or wether it's in our recovered capacity to think them out and to live

them as symbols that lies the key to cultural and above all spiritual transmutation. Among the signs announcing such a turn over, I think it's right to mention the regain on interest to all the initiatic ways, among which alchemy seems to be playing a central role, determined, already in the past, by its vocation of Ars Magna. But I must give you some precisions :

First of all, it seems that what one names to-day Anthropology has been made out of the combined ruins of theology and philosophy ; philosophy that seems to be henceforth condemned like other sciences, to be specialized in one or another knowledge, to be nothing else than a neo-positivist epistemology, just because she was unable to resist to the different attacks she was victim of during the nineteenth century : attacks led by empirism and experimentalism, and by marxism ; and, in a much more subtle way by Nietzsche, the great diagnosticist of this collapse. The reconstruction of an Anthropology — which is the global knowledge of human being — constitutes therefore at the same time a progress and a very dangerous perspective. A progress, because the different sciences that will participate in this construction, propose to bring together what has been dislocated by the different positivities ; a new danger, because the methods used for this unification constitute, most of the time, a new mutilation of the potentialities and of the human hopes, encouraged indeed justified by technologies that still have the power. So, the question that is coming up once more to-day through the approach methodologies of human being, of society and of history, concerns the possible new relations between the One and the multiple, between knowledge and hope, we can try to elaborate from the rational facts in our possession. If the reborn human unity would have to be only the sum of partial positivities, what orientation could we give to Anthropology, condemned to realize the reunification of what is for ever inessential ? What "Reality" could

we hope from these facts that have no other value than the material and intellectual proof that one has been able to give to their arranged existence ?

Even if this type of questioning is not new and comes up everytime revolutionary technological progress seem to destabilize the foundations of human organization, the threats are nevertheless becoming more and more precise and it's against them that we can raise the new Anthropology which wishes to recover a unique and multiple man among the rags left by the too famous "human nature", responsable of the breaking off from the divine. It is significant that this has been the main questioning of the most lucid european thinkers during the first half ot the twentieth century :for example, it haunts the thought of Husserl in The crisis of european sciences (I936) but also Heidegger in his Letter upon humanism(I946) and we can also find it in all the researches of C.G.Jung and of M.Eliade, of H.Corbin and of G.Durand.

His Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire (I960) indeed, far from being just a simple classification of the differnent "régimes" of images, are pleading for a fundamental reorientation of culture. Defining the spirit of this new Anthropology should therefore not only be the rediscovery of unusual models of thinking, old before they are born ; but must also be concerned by what animates it inside, by the vital desire that it carries, which has been perfectly explained by the author (unknown) of the book Méditations sur les 22 arcanes majeurs du Tarot : "Hermetism, the hermetic living tradition, sustains the commun soul of all real culture(...) The hermetists listen to — and sometimes hear — beatings of the heart of the spiritual life of humanity. They can only survive as the protectors of the commun life and soul of religion, of science and of art. They have no privileges an any of these fields. The saints, the real scientists and the artists of genius are much superior than they are. But the

hermetists are living for the mystery of the heart that's at the bottom of every religion, philosophy, of all art and of all past, present and future sciences"(3).

If the new Anthropology wants to be hermetist, it has to take up the role, symbolically chivalrous, of the heart's keeper, at least to witness that it has never stopped beating. It is easy to understand that if this task nourishes itself from the different knowledges gleaned hither and thither from the multiple branches of sciences, its real vocation is to ordonate and to recentrate them, following the only rule of interior rectitude, which is after all the true finality that garanties its full effectivness. But the "keeper of the heart" meets many kinds of difficulties, all lied up to the nature of symbols (especially alchemical) and to their insertion in what we call culture. The other difficulty consists in the very problematical realization of what alchemy calls transmutation .

First of all, is it possible to define, even approximately, what is a symbol ? Let's say that the systematic exploration of dreams, myths, religions...have led to distinguish very clearly between symbolic function and conceptual function, and to see in the symbol something else than just an arbitrary sign as it is in mathematics or in linguistics, for example. A symbol, wether it is human(collective unconscious) or divine (as shown by all the traditions), is always a knot of meaning, the often paradoxal meeting of antagonist elements, to the eys of non-contradictory logic . In that way, it nearly always constitutes a challenge to take up with other middles than those reserved to purely logical problems, specially since the medium is an image strongly charged with affectivity or spirituality, unifying the significant and the signified. But, in opposition to the concept, that's looking for the closest possible adequation between the two, therefore the most expressible, the symbol stays, as G.Durand tells us in a beautiful way " a sign of the signified for ever widowed"(4). Hence this poverty

would be its richness because it incites to take off for a spring, it provokes surpassing oneself much more than taking for granted the possession of a codified sense (the role of what R. Alleau calls synthèse)(5). The symbol would always be therefore "epiphany of a mystery"(G. Durand). In a very similar way, this is what writes the anonymous author that we have already talk about, thinking precisely about hermetic and alchemical symbols : "The mystery is protected in an other way than the secret. His protection is his light, the protection of secret is obscurity. And the arcanum which is the medium degree between the mystery and the secret, it is the crepuscule that protects it. For it shows itself and it hides itself in the same time, using symbolism. Symbolism is the crepuscule of arcanum"(p.91).

Since the works of exegesis concerning symbols are more and more coming, one can question oneself on the place given by our culture to the notion and above all to the reality of crepuscule, that allows the revelation of arcanum, and not only as a sign of decay. I am not questioning the importance of this sort of studies, since that they allow to maintain a very important part of the cultural patrimoine of humanity. But this doesn't make the risk any smaller ; the risk that these symbols, apprehended in this manner, constitute some kinds of "reserves", in which simply curious people and scholars badly need have a monography, can go and draw from. But on an other hand, the large diffusion of symbolism and its popularization can lead to even more pernicious forms of desymbolization, by the immersion and dilution of the symbols in the shapeless field of images largely divulgated by a civilization, waiting from them for its definition, when it doesn't simply call itself a consumer civilization. In such a way, symbols take part of the fascinating power of images, exploded and demultiplied by media. How can't I mention the actual infatuation for dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other studies, more or less written with the scientific serious required,

and discussant, from a completely objective point of view, on some symbols like water, fire, dragon, caducée, heart... Or even worst, all these syncretic effects of vulgarization which want to show the unity of the universe by just confusing the different categories of reflexion, creation and believes.

Hence it seems that our contemporary world, animated by the desire to draw from the everlasting spring of symbols, finds itself confronted with the very ancient and difficult question of the relationship between exoterism and esoterism : are now the "fundamental symbols of the sacred science", following the expression of R.Guénon, still susceptible of organizing and of invigorating a culture, otherwise than by producing degraded forms that ^{make} (then even more pernicious since their creative charge is inserted in cultural frames that make it explosive ? The analysis of this question has been remarkably led by the iranian philosopher D.Shayegan in his book Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse ? (Les presses d'aujourd'hui, 1982). But for the person who does't accept this new and dramatic secularization of symbols, is there another way than the esoteric one, a way with no direct impact on collective life ? The "keeper of the heart" are then the very few knights fellow wisdom that E.Jünger talks about in Auf den Marmor-klippen(1939), while humanity is blindly accomplishing its apocalyptic fate.

But it is possible that alchemy—because it has always been in the heart of a all the great religions an esoteric way and in the same time a praxis,—designed to regenerate the material world, can shine a new light on these difficulties. These few remarks lead us to bring this vaste question down to the relationship between symbolization and transmutation, therefore it is easier for us to take an interest in the process by which the symbols are setted to work rather than the controled forms in which they appear to-day, conceiving these symbols as eternal, but neglecting the necessary conditions for their reactivation in the

world surrounding us now and in which we must "work".

To inscribe the symbols in the dynamic of matter : this seems to be the role played by the alchemistic thought. Unlike the scientist prejudice which says that alchemy is just a former rudimentary chemistry ; but according to the knowledge brought by the hermetic tradition continued in the twentieth century by the works of Fulcanelli, E.Canseliet and R.Alleau ; and also, in a more anthropological way, by the researches of C.G.Jung, M.L.von Franz and J.Hillman, we will consider alchemy as a "traditional" science and art, trying to conduct an inspired controle of cosmic and telluric energies and a joint regeneration of man and matter :

"Alchemy is the sacrificial science of substances of the earth, the transfigurant liturgy applicable to the occupations that concern the nature apparently unanimated", writes M.Aniane(6). In this perspective, alchemy is not at all a reval for the great religions, but works, on the cosmologic level that is his own, to the becoming of the Great Mysteries.

If alchemy constitutes a privileged initiatic way, it is because it deals with the savegarde of the material and of the spiritual world, and because it devotes itself to the common destiny of the Nature and of the operator, that we can consider both as a wise man and an artist, as a philosopher and as a priest. We must now try to show how alchemy allows us to assist to the birth of the symbolic function in the heart of matter, and by what way the Great Work, accomplishment of the Unity, spiritualize the bodies and makes corporeal the spirits ; how it becomes the symbol of symbols, while the crucible of transmutation reveals itself as the privilaged place where all real symbolization's process achieves itself.

First, we have to pay attention to the very shining remark of R.Alleau : "Alchemy, stating that 'all things observable are symbolic' affirms that 'all what is symbolic is observable' and therefore, that the highest Symbol of the symbol,

that is to say the Unity, is observable and that the 'real man' can contemplate the incarnation of Logos in the matter"(7). The originality and the fertility of the alchemic thought is in actual fact, as R.Alleau suggests to us, in the determined way that it has performed the affirmation of the reciprocity of the observable and of the symbolic. That one must precise, nevertheless, that this kind of observation implies an existential and spiritual engagement and not only an attitude of distanciation and of objectivation. One must be in the state where it is possible to see the emergence of the symbols in the observable, at the meeting point of the awoken spirit and of the matter, where they become synchronic and thereby, nearly musical. Without these precisions, we would come back to some of the considerations of G.Bachelard, for example, for whom the alchemist is nothing else but a dreamer ; an inspired dreamer indeed, but unable to realize anything outside his own imaginary sphere, reduced to its "poetical" function(8).

now the old alchemic adage "Ora et labora" suggests enough how much the watching of the alchemist engaged both his operative hability and his finest interior dispositions, purified by the work accomplished on matter, itself ready to emerge from his sleep. If the mystery of alchemy is such a thing existing, it resides in this operative synchronicity, which the translation by the terms "to act upon.". or "the relationship between the cause and the effect", is very imperfect and unfaithfull to the deep aims of this initiatic way. Moreover, we never insist enough on the fact that alchemy is a science and an art in which the relationship between the look and the visible is determinant ; a "discipline of arcanum" which makes of the Adept an extralucid, a visionary. This proved by the unceasing recallings that we can find in the old treatises, of the multiple symbolic signs that matter is constelated with, and informing the watchfull operator about the progression of the Great Work : colors (Black, White, Red...), stars, clouds,

and sometimes landscapes, everyone in his way, show that the matter is really a microcosm , just waiting to reflect the great All and to accomplish the divine will with thanks to the enlighten and attentive care of the "sons of Hermès". But the alchemist perceives the modifications of matter as symbols only because he has been capable of realizing them and of living inwardly their "concrete" reality. In this way, alchemy ties together very intimately the apparition of symbols and the "praxis", and it becomes the fundament of a "materialism" which is completely opposed to those of the philosophers of the nineteenth century, like Marx an particular.

This praxis is before all "natural magic" and the operator ,instead of acting on the matter on a restrictive way, contents himself in putting the matter to work, of purifying and preparing it, following the secret aims of Nature, who remains the only mistress of the destiny of the great Work and therefore offers herself as a divine mirror. So, unlike the simplistic vision of the detractors of alchemy, this art does not search for the multiplication of material wells, but incites to a form of detachment closer to the ethics of the Bhagavad Gîtâ : to do what we have to do, to detach oneself in advance from the fruits of act, for fear that we corrupt them...In this condition only, man collects sometimes the golden fruits which, in the alchemic perspective, are never the "products" of a work, the results of a serie of causes and effects technically organised, but always something more, a grace. Saying that this kind of work is a profoundly anticapitalistic process, does not mean that we are criticising the mode of production of certain countries in the globe, and revalorizing in fact the socialist mode, which, after all, is exactly similar in his intentions concerning the Nature and the necessity to exploit it, even if they are very differnent in the social and political side ; I just want to say that the alchemists ,like must of the mystics and the gnostics,

have been able to see and sometimes to achieve by their work an other relationship to "matter" ,the only one capable to go beyond the conflictual and sterile opposition between materialism and spiritualism.

Hence, it seems ^{an} extraordinary significant fact that a thinker like Heidegger, great detractor of all modes of inspection (Ge-stell, Arraisionnement in french), of the Phusis (φ), takes up so often in his own name, without naming them as "alchemical", some of the action modalities the most important of this "work" on matter, which is also Logos on the way of incarnation. But we must go one step beyond this point to understand the internal relationship between matter and symbols and the decisive role played by the Nigreso state (Work in darkness) in the process of symbolization/transmutation.

Let's ask once more the question : what is a symbol for the alchemists ? It's a visible and recognizable form taken, at a certain moment, by the enlightening state of the matter in transformation ; and, therefore, in parallel, it is an interior state lived by the Artist. And as since all the ancient treatises state more or less the same things under different appareances, we can, from one to another, recognize several constant great themes and, in particular, the principle phases of the Great Work : Black (Nigredo, death and decomposition), White (Albedo sublimation and spiritualization), Red (Rubedo, glorification and regeneration).

Let's give somme examples :

Nigredo : Tomb -rot - crow - Saturn - Hell - shadows - chaos - manure - Capricorne - Occident...

Albedo : Dove - Virgin - moon - Diana - dew - milk - Swan - snow ...

Rubedo : Rubis - carbuncle - gold - diamond - Elixir - Hermetic androgyne - Osiris - Philosppher's Stone...

This type of classification, even simplistic, has the merit to show to the reader the existence of symbolic configurations rather than isolated symbols ; which

call at the same time to mind the different planes and levels on which the Great Work operates. Since matter is well a microcosm, these states cover symbolically different aspects of the ordinary reality. Every configuration irradiates in a certain way around itself very diverse zones, diffuses itself into them and brings them back indirectly to the Unity of the Great Work.

Hence the first consequence : the eye of an alchemist is capable of recognizing the symbolic potential scope of any fragment of reality even the one that appears the most trivial and, from there, of transforming everything : doesn't one say that the Philosopher's Stone can be hidden on the side of the paths, traded by the unaware passers by just next to the heaps of manure ? This eye is also able to reconduct this fragment to the Unity and, therefore, is able to assure its safeguard. But, inversely, it doesn't exist an authentic symbol without possessing a material existence, incarnated. In such a way that, step by step, it's the all universe who, reunified in its formal diversity, shows up to be symbolic. So a symbol is never isolated but it carries with itself all the symbolic tissue of the Unus Mundus.; and, in the same way, any part of this tissue can send back to the totality.

Consequently, it would be more correct to say that for the eye of the alchemist, nothing is the symbol of anything else, but that every element symbolizes with the totality. Because man is the privileged mediator between God and Nature, he recovers therefore his symbolic vocation that makes of him the Arch of **Alliance** between sky and earth. It was what instructed the Corpus Hermeticum (II° and III° century a.C.) supposed to have been written by Hermes Trismegiste ; it's what the alchemists tried to conceive and to realize on matter, and what the very large trend of the Naturphilosophie (whose influence was considerable on the European thought and creation between the Renaissance and the XIX° century) endeavoured

to perpetuate. It's this operative intuition of Unity that poets like Baudelaire or Rimbaud, a musician like Wagner, or an explorer of the deep psyche like Jung, tempted to recover.

Outside of the symbolic configurations that we have been talked about before, and tied to the different stages through which matter must pass, purified from his "impurities", in order to have access to its glorious destiny, alchemy makes of the couple Sulfur-Mercury, King-Queen, Sun-Moon, the principal actor or its microcosmic drama. In such a way that we can be tempted to see in them the model of all "coincidentia oppositorum"; and since a symbol is also always a wedding between two opposites, the bases of all symbolic process. Which would mean that every symbol is, at least, in potentiality, a Hieros Gamos and that alchemy, that bases the success of the Great Work on those of the "chemical weddings", is the prototype of every symbolic thought process, which is always a call for the transmutation of a foul matter into "gold". This fundamental proposition must be completed by a close look on the functioning of the alchemical language.

The assumption of "Solve et coagula" provokes constant questioning on the disconcerting language procedures that have tried to translate verbally the paradoxes that are inherent to the life of matter, and to the conducting of the Great Work : How to integrate in the same thought the affirmation of the Unity of matter , unceasingly repeated, and the noting of his infinite possibilities ? Multiplicity that the alchemists do not deny, as did for example Platon and the Hindouists, but they see in this multiplicity the proof of the infinite power of a purified and unified matter. Does't the projection's powder have the same multiplication's power ? How can we say, in a materialist way, that everything is "matter" and that, in fact, nothing is really "matter" ? How to say that this matter, that offers itself to the alchemist's eyes, in multiple colored epiphanies, is

truly the keeper of a mystery, of the arcanum of all creation, and the very symbol of all occultation ? How can we understand the famous axiom of Marie the prophetess which says : "One becomes two, two becomes three, and from the third is born the One as the fourth" ? (IO) How can we accord the affirmation that the Great Work is only accomplished by the intervention of "only one matter, one vase and one fire", with the declaration of this other treatise talking about the "matter with thousand names" ?

The apparent confusion of the alchemic language is therefore not only the expression of the will of hiding a secret to the eyes of the nonbelievers ; this confusion is the witness of an incredible effort to express, by taken the risk of an internal bursting, the "passion" lived by matter and the tensions take place in it. One can therefore say that if this tension between the contradictory elements characterizes the symbol, which is also an invitation to the always "irrational" creation of a way of surpassing oneself, well it's truly "matter", in a large sense, which is principally and first of all symbolic. Since when put into the hands of the Artist, matter continues to invent herself, and pursues her own development without being defaited by the absolute paralogism , profusion of which the language tries to transcribe.

The rational logic , in a certain way, fixes the semantic and verbal flux, in opening up the comprehension or the extension of the concept, but never both simultaneously. Is it possible to imagine and to conceive a class of objects that could be at the same time infinite by the number of substantives and by the multiplicity of qualifications in connexion with everyone of them ? Or, in the opposite way, a closing up on the unique, corresponding to a unique property of this only one object ? The alchemical language will try in the same time to express the principle of an operative unity and the existence of an infinite

number of powers, obtained by working at the Great Work. An other difficulty adds itself to all this, because the Unity, potentiality of the "materia prima" to be created, is in fact really attained in the Philosopher's Stone, opened up to a new infinity, those of her multiplying vertues. Matter is therefore opened on two different infinities, and language must also make the effort to express what happens between the two, in the transmutation's vase, through a process during which matter starts resonating with the macrocosm, and symbolizes with it. In fact, the task consists in expressing by language and at the same time by the work on furnace, the beginning and the end of the "Opus chemicum", the head and the tail (the tail of Ouroboros snake), the passage from unity still undifferentiated (materia prima) to the perfected unity (Philosopher's Stone, Gold...).

How could a language submitted to such a dynamic, allow itself to be only classifying? How the symbols, finding birth in it, could be limited to reflect an invisible reality, a sort of double transcendent, since that all the alchemical thought is inhabited by the search of an incarnation which would be also a transfiguration and let's say a transmutation? We are not trying to deny the existence of symbols in the language, thought and iconography of alchemy; but I am insisting on the very necessity of always situating their apparition in regards of a precise moment of the Great Work, of a reference plane well determined and at last of the global integrative perspective without which they just become simple signs and simply maintain a metaphysical dualism that alchemy has always fought against; without which, detached from the crucible, the symbol is radically mutilated of its transmutation's power, just because it doesn't carry anymore the dynamic and the "place" that gave birth to it.

So, it's not enough to just recognize and consider the paradoxal reality of alchemical symbols, as Jung did, for example; or let's rather say that recognizing

it should not make one forget that if any "coincidentia oppositorum" is in the heart of the process of transmutation, the most evident and characteristic knot, the alchemical process of transmutation/symbolization puts simultaneously on stage a group of gestures and figures which, integrated, produced the Great Work as symbol.

- 1) A circularity, wanted by the form of the vase indeed, but ~~s~~pecially by the unity of matter and by the necessity of the circulation of the four Elements (Earth-Water-Air-Fire) one in the other.
- 2) The ascension and the descension, witness of the purification (sublimation) of the compost, of the *elevation* of the lighten soul, of its coming down to the earth, without which the Great Work would be menaced with desincarnation.
- 3) A fight between "natures", humid and dry, fix and volatil, feminin~~e~~ and masculine, leading up to an equilibration which is not a compromise but a reciproc^{al}/interlacing and growth.
- 4) Epiphanies, and other symbolic apparitions that constellates and punctuates the matter and show the progression of the Work.

So, an other important interrogation brought up by ~~the~~ alchemical symbolism, concerns the inversion of signs, more precisely tied up to this decisive phase of the Great Work which is called Nigredo and that the alchemists unanimously recognize as the determinant condition for the realization of transmutation :

"semen is unuseless if it stays all, if it does't become rotten and black ; for corruption always precede regeneration"⁽¹¹⁾. For the observer, this sentence is easily recognizable by the symbols that cover the matter; it is this sentence that inspired the most spectacular representations : death, decomposition, decapitation, dilaceration... are all these tortures lived *by* matter, closer to the initiatic tests used by many traditions.

But if one admits the postulate that says that the drama of the transmutation is simultaneously lived by the matter and by the alchemist, one must then think about the death of the matter, we must try to probe its horrible emptiness, its afflicted silence, its disturbing disarray...all the texts insist on the complete desorientation that hits the microcosm ; or even on the despair that inhabits its heart. What is then the role of the symbols, lived from inside the decomposing compost ? Let's insist on this point : one is not satisfied here by just contemplating the signs of decomposition, even if they are given the qualification of symbols by an opened (enlightened) eye, but we are led to question ourselves, as matter do, surrounded by incertitude on its own aptitude of symbolizing. This is no doubt the greatest paradox of the alchemical symbolism and to which is suspended all the power of symbolization/transmutation : it's in the darkest night (Niger nigrius nigro) in the *most baffling* absence of marks, of all symbols, that the power of symbolizing is born, the power of reorienting and of bringing together. All real symbol is born from this emptiness and can go back to it. No definitive certitude guarantees a definitive plenitude. From this "black hole" in the center of the matter results nevertheless one of the greatest enlightening power that men could ever wish to give themselves.

For sure, this purificative test is not only part of the alchemical practise and thought :let's just remember the "dark night" lived by St John of the Cross, the ascent to Carmel, the "lose one's hold" practised by taoism, or the terrible abandon of Christ at Gethsemani, and we would easily understand the symbolism of this initiation by emptiness. But the merit of the alchemists is, once more, to have shown the horror of this death and his saving power through the drama of matter ; what is summed by the very suggestive formula : "The venom will give the highest remedy" (12).

But only the conducting of the Great Work will allow the transmutation of this one into the other. If all symbol is always ambiguous, it's because it reflects this bipolarity; but it offers in the same time a double issue, and suggests, initiates the transmutation's process. The most difficult thing to accept by our mind is that is by the abandoning of all symbols, -even of the symbol of abandon![!]-that, always in a very mysterious way, the signs turn over; turning ^{over} by which the power of symbolization/transmutation is regenerated. On the other hand, since we can find the same principle in homeopathic medicine, and not only an a large spiritual symbolism, ~~we~~ we can consider that we are in front of one of the surest experimental bases of the hermetic and alchemic thought and, in the same time, in front of a very important therapeutic principle applicable to the ill person as well to the Creation, or to what we call to-day civilization. Nietzsche, already, wanted to be the great "healer" of culture⁽¹³⁾; some others after him, A.Artaud for example⁽¹⁴⁾, tried, most of the time despearly, to tie up with this great^{principles} (of paracelsian and alchemical medicine, in order to bring to their time the necessary poison-anti-poison that they needed. Considering all these remarks, in what mesure the rebirth of symbolism can be considered as, at least, one of these remedies ?

If all alchemical "dissolution" allows a "coagulation" on a highest level, it is because the awakening is so provoked by the opening and the revelation ; but all "coagulation" not counterbalanced enough by an ever potential "dissolution" would lead to the formation of concretions, of idolized objects, and materialism is one of its ordinary forms. The research of this very difficult alchemical balance (Alchemy was often named "science of the balance"), is not so far from the essential objectives of all real civilization, wishing to incarnate on the temporal level Harshness and Mercifulness, giving the possibility to foresee the Temple. After all, is the Arch as different as that from the transmutation's

vase ? So, it is very important to understand that the revelation obtained by the symbols is only operative because the vision is followed by reoccultation (I5) which saves the symbol to degenerate into an idolized image, and to one who foresaw it to collect only the diminished benefits.

Now the present spread of the great symbols in which the ancient traditions nourished themselves, does not only testify the profane aims of a society became mainly spectacular ; it may refer also to what R. Abellio designed as "the end of esoterism" (I6), in an obviously ambiguous formula : the term of an Era, and its accomplishment, the Apocalypsis. It is possible that from now on one will have to go and collect the seeds of the Stone on the new heaps of manure that are formed by the dealy sights of our merchant society ; which does't have to occult what soever since it seems to have lost the real meaning of what is esoterism : the mystery of all creation. The "matter" of the Great Work that seems to be prostituted, is perhaps better protected by this spread itself, and trusted to the only few initiated able to deliver it from the worst slavery that it has never fallen into : the obscenity of the look, turned into a consumption value, a rule of production, an ideal of realization. If we are therefore speaking about "the end of the christian Era", with the same rich ambiguity, is't it because the all Creation is reliving now the infamy of Golgotha ?

Which means that in front of this pseudo-symbolic unfurl, in front of this new idolatrous temptation, only the rectitude of an authentic way and the acceptance of loss, the abandoning to emptiness and to silence, can make of the transmutation a lived reality and not anymore a simple metaphor that would not therefore have the creative power of all real poetry. So, the resymbolization instigated by Anthropology well constitutes a savegarde and an invitation, but also a menace, if one was tempted to take it as a path since its only function is to

to gather materials for a reconstruction. To the anthropologist's eyes, it's a fact that the large field of culture offers the nearly infinite resources of an inexhaustible patrimoine, a kind of plenitude through which it is possible to draw up some great constants, even a universality. The mistake would be to think that this work of recollection and of comparison, could take the place of the discovery of universality and Unity, through the living test of a transmutation's process which, from the hole made in the symbolic texture, leads the initiated to an integrated vision of the Unus Mundus.

Now this type of experience is those of a lost, of emptiness and abandon. For sure, multiple forms of deficiency are tearing the modern world ; but they must be lived in the perspective of the Great Work if one wants them to become really symbolic and transmutative. Whatever, it seems that we must rediscover ~~the~~ experience of a certain "poverty", without which the "way of symbols" is one more mystification. Material poverty to which the rich countries are beginning to think about, seeing the extreme distress of the poorest ; but must at all the acceptance of a deeper and more important "poverty", facing the proliferation of knowledges that make the modern man, whether he wants or not, always too provided.

No transmutation without the "Black Work" ; no Nigredo without the voluntary deprivation of the matter. It would be too easy to wait for history, always rich in this sort of happening, to offer us new occasions to live bearness on the ruins of the defaited power's will. One can imagine other initiatic situations than new camps of death. So, I think that we can conclude that the Era of ~~the~~ "alchemists" has more than ever come, if they designate all these "men of desire" (I7), capable of reversing signs into symbols, even and especially when some of the most important of them are now offered to the greediness of masses, who content themselves to continue a sleep that can only become more and more murderess.

Symbolization and transmutation

Notes

1. Talking of this "dark Era", read for example R.Guenon, La crise du monde moderne, Paris : Gallimard, 1975, p.16 à 36.
2. C.G.Jung has led the analysis of this threat in Présent et avenir, Paris : Denoël, Gonthier, 1970 ; and in Aspects du drame contemporain, Paris : Buchet-Chastel, 1971.
3. Méditations sur les 22 arcanes majeurs du Tarot, Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1980. foreword by Hans Urs von Balthasar.
4. G.Durand, L'imagination symbolique, Paris : P.U.F., 1976, p.8.
5. R. Alleau, De la nature du symbole, Paris : Flammarion, 1958.
6. M. Aniane, "Notes sur l'alchimie, 'yoga' cosmologique de la chrétienté médiévale" in Yoga, science de l'homme intégral, Paris : Cahiers du Sud, 1953, p.243.
7. R. Alleau, Aspects de l'alchimie traditionnelle, Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1950, p.131
8. More specially in some works like La psychanalyse du feu, La formation de l'esprit scientifique and La poésie de la rêverie.
9. On this subject, see the important article "La question de la technique", p.9 à 48, in Essais et conférences, Paris : Gallimard, 1976.
10. Mentioned by C.G.Jung in Psychologie et alchimie, Paris : Buchet-Chastel, 1979, p.31
11. M.A. Crasselame, La lumière sortant par soi-même des ténèbres, Paris : Denoël, 1971, p.42.
12. Lamsprinck, Traité de la Pierre philosophale, Paris : Denoël, 1972, p.16.
13. This care is unceasingly present in Le livre du philosophe, for example, Paris : Aubier-Flammarion, 1969.
14. A. Artaud, Oeuvres complètes, t. VIII and IX, Paris : Gallimard, 1979 and 1980/
15. This reoccultation is inseparable from the revelation taught by Hermes Trismegiste : "Hermes saw all the things ; and, having seen, he understood ; and, having understood, he had the power to reveal and to show. Hence, the things he knew,

Notes (the end)

he engraved them and, having engraved them he hid them, having better preferred, upon the most of them to keep a firm (closed)silence rather than to speak about ~~them~~, in order that the generations born after the world have to find them".(Corpus Hermeticum, Paris : Les belles Lettres, 1980, t.IV, XXXIII,5.)

16. R.Abellio, la fin de l'ésotérisme, Paris : Flammarion, 1973.

17. According to the expression of L.C.de Saint-Martin, L'homme de désir, Paris : Ed. du Rocher, 1979.