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# The Age of Spirit

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## BOOK I

### THE SYMBOL AND THE SACRED

In this the *first cycle* I intend to consider the symbol as the sensible and manifest revelation of the sacred. Such is the point of departure for this investigation as a whole, which will endeavor to contemplate the symbol and determine the categories that can be deduced from such a reflection. To this end we will begin by considering the symbol according to the original meaning and etymology of the term. We will talk of “symbolizing” (verbal form) more than “symbol” (noun). Reference will be made, in effect, to the meditative action which “throws together” (*sym-ballein*) two fragments of a coin or divided medal which stipulates, by means of a password, an alliance.

One of those fragments can be considered “available” (the fragment that is possessed). The other fragment, on the other hand, is “somewhere else”. The symbolic event constitutes a complex process or course in which the union and coincidence of the two parts can take place. One of the parts, the one that is

possessed, can be considered the “symbolizing” part of the symbol. The other, which is not available, constitutes the other half without which the first part lacks a horizon of meaning: it is that to which the first part is sent in order to obtain significance (what constitutes that which the first part symbolizes: the symbolized).

## THE TABLE OF CATEGORIES AND AGES OF THE WORLD

### 1

The symbol is a (*sym-bolic*) unity that presupposes a break. At first, the symbolizing form, the manifest and manifesting aspect of the symbol (given to vision, perception, or hearing) and that which the symbol symbolizes, which constitutes the symbol’s horizon of meaning, is disjointed. It takes on certain forms, figures, presences, traces, or words. But the keys that permit one to rightfully orient oneself with what they mean are missing. There is, then, an original break or fracture which premises the entire symbolic drama. This scene of exile —whose *dramatis personae* are the separated symbolizing part and the withdrawn symbolized part— is prepared and arranged by a certain alliance prior to the culmination of the drama’s plot. The drama leads toward the final scene of reunion or unification in which both parts “come together” and achieve their desired conjunction.<sup>1</sup>

*Symbolic categories* determine this dramatic scene and the process or course of its plot. Such categories reveal or make emerge the conditions that make possible the final event or the resolution of the drama.<sup>2</sup> These categories are like stairs: the first one prepares the second, which serves as the condition for the third, etc. In virtue of these different *revelations*, the conditions of the symbolic event come to light.

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<sup>1</sup> Symbol was, in its origin, a password: a divided coin or medal that was carried as proof of friendship or alliance. The giver kept one of the parts in her possession. The receiver only had one half in his possession, such that in the future he could produce it as proof of the alliance by joining his part with the part possessed by the giver. In this case the two parts could be “thrown together” with the purpose of seeing if they fit together. From that the expression *sym-bolon* came into existence, meaning that which was “thrown together”.

<sup>2</sup> In the following chapters each of these categories will be unfolded; we only announce them here. I retain from the Kantian conception of “category” the sense of “the condition of possibility” (in this context, the condition that makes the production of the symbolic event possible). These categories are necessary conditions, so that they all constitute indispensable requisites in order for a given event to take place. These categories are, furthermore, successive and stair-like *revelations* of the event. In order to make sense of this characterization we will use the metaphor of a musical scale.

Such revelations form a *scale*, like the scale of musical intervals in music, insofar as the first revelation determines the second, which leads to the third, etc.

The symbolizing form or figure emerges from this process. But this presupposes the intervention of a fundamental condition: the very matrix of the entire symbolic process. This matrix, or matter, physically supports the symbol. In order to appear as a symbolic *form* or *figure*, matter must be formed or transformed.

Symbolic matter is the first condition or category which opens the path and movement that culminates in the symbolic event. This cannot be produced without presupposing the material dimension which serves as the lowest and most fundamental interval of the scale (to use musical terms). The material dimension constitutes the *basso ostinato* that supports the tonal edifice. In this sense the material or matrix character is revealed in every symbol.

The second condition can be built upon symbolic matter. In order for there to be a symbolic event, the maternal, matrix substrate must be ordered and delimited until it appears as a *cosmos*. A world (which places limits, demarcations, and determinations onto *undifferentiated matter*) must be “created” or “formed”. Such demarcations of matter appear as a spatial sectioning (*temenos, templum*) or as a temporal marking (*tempus*, hour: the determination of festivals).<sup>3</sup> The temple and the festival appear, then, as the effects (in space and time) of the transformation of matter into cosmos or world.

All of this is now available for the scene that serves as the condition of possibility for the *symbolic event*. The event is always an encounter or a (sym-bolic) relation between a certain *presence* that reveals itself and a certain *witness* that recognizes that presence (and determines its form or figure). This presence (of the sacred) and this (human) witness form a correlation: a genuine *presencing relation* which seals, in manifest form, this encounter. By virtue of this *presencing relation*, presence acquires form or figure as a theophany, a figure that can be represented, or like a glorious *aura* or radiating light.

This *presencing relation* constitutes the condition of possibility for a genuine communication between presence and witness (through speech or writing). Such verbal or written communication completes the symbolic manifestation or ends the

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<sup>3</sup> *Temenos* (temple, in Greek) means demarcation, section (from the root *tem*, meaning “to cut”). Demarcation and sectioning, or clearing, are undertaken on behalf of a sacred space; for example, the creation of a “clearing” in the middle of a forest by cutting trees or the enjoyment of an opening. The confines of the space made by the cutting of trees are circumscribed, because the limits of the sacred place are *taboo*, only to be modified by ritual. The temple is, then, the *place* of the sacred, apart from “nature” (wild or wooded). It introduces a “lightening” of the density of the forest in virtue of which a place for the sacred appears. The temple is, in sum, *the sacred as place*; the festival is the time of the sacred, or *the sacred as time*. Time, *tempus*, has the same root as temple. (See Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 volumes, especially the second volume devoted to mythology). To consult the texts cited, please see the general bibliography. In the context of notes, I will only cite the text (referring to the original, or, on occasion, the Spanish translation).

*symbolizing* process of the symbol. As a result of this communication, a revelation arises in (sacred) spoken form or in (holy) scripture. This seals and closes the stair-like series of symbolizing categories.<sup>4</sup>

This last (verbal and written) category constitutes the (material) condition of the first category relative to *the symbolized*. The (oral and written) revelation that was completed by means of communication now requires exegesis: a referral or re-sending from the symbolizing, manifest side (literally the spoken word or the text) to the (hermeneutical) keys that can reveal its meaning. Without a previous manifestation or revelation (be it poetic, prophetic, or inspired), such referral is impossible. But as soon as this manifestation happens, the (exegetical or allegorical) method that leads to the aforementioned keys that serve as *ideal forms* of meaning must be determined.

But these forms or ideas (be they Platonic, Gnostic, or Neo-Platonist) crash into a final Obstacle which holds back the exegetical and allegorical impulse. The referral or re-sending moves from the unfolding of *ideas* and *forms* towards the final moment in which all enquiry concerning meaning seems to be annulled. The symbol (unlike allegory or conceptual schematism) always keeps a *mystical* remnant which reveals its structurally religious character to a secret, sealed, holy (to the sacred, with its particular ambivalence) substrate.<sup>5</sup> The ideal conditions of meaning are those which serve as the condition for the ascent towards the mystical.

This mystical encounter, however, needs to return to a situation that can produce the *link* between the symbolizing and the symbolized parts in order to be consummated as a symbolic event. In this sense the mystical allows for the necessary retreat from this negative and sublime ascent towards the constitutionally transcendent in order to go to the *frontier space* where the symbol can be put to the test, to try to constitute itself as a possible *sym-bolic* joining of the symbolizing part and that which that part symbolizes.

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<sup>4</sup> The symbol, *sym-bolon*, expresses the conjunction (*sym*; *cum* in Latin) between two fragments (of a coin or medal) initially divided. One of them, the *symbolizing* part, is in the witness's possession. The other fragment is not available. The first should be brought to union with the second, that to which the first part refers; this will be called the *symbolized* part of the symbol.

<sup>5</sup> This ambivalence remains in the Greek and Latin languages (and Spanish): *hagios* (*sanctus*, holy) and *hieros* (*sacer*, sacred), which pertain to two articulated dimensions of one same *phenomenon* (the holy-and-sacred). The holy refers to the highest and sublime: that which cannot be touched or grazed by the witness (or even "looked at"). The sacred, on the other hand, can be touched; one can operate with it (the cultic or sacrificial object); one can destroy and consume it; the sacred can refer to anything execrable that can be repulsive. The sacred can signify that which is "execrable, repulsive, sinister" (like *sacer* in Latin). Please see Sigmund Freud's *Totum and Taboo*. Regarding the double form of presentation of the sacred as a mystery that produces horror (*phobos*) and/or fascination, please see Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto conceptualizes "the sacred-and-the-holy" as the referent to an experience of radical alterity (*ganz Anderes*). It deals with a radical Alterity that is enclosed by the "mystery", or that which is hidden and enclosed, or obscure. Such a mystery makes a place for the double experience of the *mysterium fascinans* (the enchanting and bewitching aspect of the sacred) and the *mysterium tremendum* (the terrible and threatening aspect of the sacred). Both dimensions are intimately interconnected.

The symbolic completion takes place in this frontier space. The two parts of the symbol —the symbolizing part and the symbolized part— find their conjunction and point of coincidence. The symbol, then, is finally produced as a true event. The symbol is realized *as symbol*; its immanent teleology is reached. It assumes, then, all of the conditions which have prepared and predisposed it, presenting itself as a *symbolic event*.

2

First of all, a certain symbolizing form or figure emerges.<sup>6</sup> In order for such a figure to present itself it was necessary to give shape to a previously indeterminate substrate. Such a substrate can be designated as the *matter* which the symbol must make determinate in order to assume its symbolizing form. Matter constitutes the symbol's unique and specific character. Unlike concepts or ideas, the symbol emphasizes its material character.<sup>7</sup> It can only be realized as a symbol given this character (as symbolic material).

Once matter is formed, or the material (or matrix) substrate is converted into a cosmos, the symbolic event can be produced. In this event, that which is waited for in the cosmic scenery is presented. This is the manifest apparition of a form or figure before a witness who can recognize it. The *presencing relation*, or the encounter between symbolic presence and the witness, is constituted as the third symbolic category relative to the symbolizing side of things. The correlation culminates, then, through an opening of meaning, which is the (written or dialogical) communication between presence and the witness. The symbolization is finally communicated by words, dialogue, *logos*, or (sacred and holy) symbolic scriptures.

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<sup>6</sup> In this way, a phenomenological focus will be followed. Indications will be given later about what we mean by this, which deals with the stair-like forms of the symbol's appearance, or successive "apparitions" that reveal the interwoven conditions of the symbolic event. The material and matrix foundation appears first, which is the condition of the possibility of there being a world (cosmos). Once this *appears*, providing a *habitat* for the symbolic event, the symbol that presents itself (before a witness) can appear. Thus the symbol is always a *phenomenon* (or manifestation) of the sacred (with its indicated ambivalence). This phenomenological method combines, as we will also see, with the structural method that makes it possible to formulate (in a categorical table) the successive revelations or symbolic categories.

<sup>7</sup> Many times this has remained in the *material* character of the symbol. This, in order to be realized as a symbol, requires material support. This is the basis of the difference between symbol and what is called *sign* in semiotic theories. In signs, the material determination seems to be put in parentheses. The empty or exhausted sign's existence is in its function, which is to designate (in the direction of an object or another sign).

These four categories (the material, the cosmic, the presencing, and the verbal), however, have only established the conditions of the symbolic event as it pertains to the symbolizing part. But all of these categories must be referred or re-sent to a horizon that provides the keys of meaning which allow the completion of exegesis or the interpretation of the manifest symbol. The (present and literal) symbol is moved towards certain ideal forms that serve as *hermeneutical keys* of meaning.

But this fifth category does not exhaust the horizon of referral. It reveals itself as a *major limit* that liminally annuls every enquiry into meaning. The horizon of referral falls into the incomprehensible negation of meaning, which allows a category to emerge that displaces the symbolic event to this major limit. This is the mystical category which modulates the symbolic event into a *mystical key* which can be defined as an event in which one encounters the liminal darkness where meaning is referred. The two parts of the symbol, the symbolizing and the symbolized, remain determined.

But this is only the symbol as the event in which the two parts reunite. So the situation where such a reunion can take place, or the “world” in which the event happens, needs to be determined. It cannot be the realm of appearance because the symbolizing categories operate there; neither can it be the hermeneutic realm which, as an ultimate substrate, remains hidden. An “intermediate world” (as Plato already intuited) in which the two parts of the symbol connect together and enter into communication must be determined. This sets up a redefinition of the character and *ethos* of the *dramatis personae* that propitiate the completion of the act or symbolic event.

The sacred presence cannot be a figure that shows itself or comes down in order to appear before the witness. Nor can it simply be an inhabitant of the realm of appearance, one who is capable of ascending to the border of the world where the sacred is and meet its manifestation there. Now the presence and the witness should finally be recognized as the two parts of the very same symbolic event.

Both presence and witness constitute the conjugated unity of the symbol as such. Both are what they are in and through this finally formed and completed symbol. Their existence can be determined as the final synthesis, the symbolic *event* itself. This is, more or less, the very *encounter* between both personae. It is the effective linking of the sacred presence and the witness.

This encounter is welcomed and celebrated in this last category through its best metaphor, which relates and argues for the amorous and passionate milestones through which such a synthetic entanglement comes to take place. The symbol, the synthesis of the symbolizing part (represented by the witness) and the symbolized part (the presence of the sacred), can be determined in the seventh category as the

(amorous and existential) *copulation* of both parts. Both are what they are by means of this final determination of the copulation.<sup>8</sup>

3

The task is to think of the symbol in all of its dimensions. By the term “symbol” we mean here an event of *verbal* character in which two pieces of a medal or a coin that is divided in half are “thrown together”. We are trying to determine, then, the conditions of possibility for the symbolic event in which both parts can come together. One part serves as the *symbolizing* part of the symbol (the available fragment). The other part (absent from the realm of appearance) refers to the available part in order to fulfill its meaning. This is the part which can determine the *meaning* of the available fragment or provide the hermeneutic keys that give meaning to the first part, thus allowing the final goal, symbolization, to happen.

The symbol is not a thing or an object; these are not its preferred modes. Instead of this or that symbol, one should speak here of this or that symbolic event. Within this event one must try and experiment to see if the two fragments of the coin or the medal, separated at the beginning, will fit together or not fit at all.<sup>9</sup> If they fit, then the symbolic event is realized.

The dimensions of the symbol are the *conditions* that make such an event possible, namely, the coming together of the two parts or the stitching together of what was previously sundered. Such conditions serve as genuine *symbolic categories* (understanding *category* in the rigorous Kantian sense).

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<sup>8</sup> The sexual and amorous copula constitutes the main metaphor to express the *existential* identity between the two parts of the symbol which, in the seventh category, reaches its conjugation; it deals with the complete union between the witness and the sacred presence (personified through the celestial, “double ideal” of the witness, his “angel”, his *agathos daimōn*). In the seventh eon, corresponding to the seventh category, the conjugation insists on having had in love life, complete with its progression of desire, love-passion, courtly love, etc., its most pertinent image.

<sup>9</sup> The two parts of the symbol are, from the beginning, divided because the *being* to which the *symbol* conforms is a *being of the limit* that maintains an original *caesura* at its heart that, justly, the symbolic event should stitch up. We will see how, through the path of the symbolic event and its diverse categories, the *caesura* is revealed that constitutes the obstacle and the test that needs to be resolved through the *sym-ballein*. We will call the event through which such *caesura* is revealed the *dia-ballic* event (from the Greek *dia-ballō*, meaning thrown through, traversing, transporting; but also disunity, calumny, indispose, accuse, lead to error), although in it occur the break and the tear of the terms that in the symbol ought to be brought together. Concerning the use of the concept of *caesura* that we make us of here, see further the enlightening notes of Friedrich Hölderlin (*Werke, Briefe, Dokumente*) about *Antigone* and *Oedipus*, where he refers to the plays in order to analyze the *tragic caesura* and the disjunction that is produced between the divine or sacred and the human plane (that stop “rhyming” together in the *caesura*). We will see, however, that the revelation of the *caesura* is not unique to the Greek “Attic tragedy”.

We are trying to determine, then, the distinct categories from which the act or event that unifies the two parts of the symbol can take place. Such categories can be settled only by following the path of the movement that culminates in the coincidence between both parts. They are, then, the distinct steps or grades that lead to the decisive test or experiment in which the symbolizing part and the symbolized part are “thrown together”. They are the very stages or scales of the symbolic process. They are distinct milestones of a plotline that concludes or resolves itself in the final symbolic test which constitutes the symbolic *act* itself.

The stair-like character allows us to formalize these categories in musical terms, in terms of distinct *keys* that cover the logical space that must be travelled in order for the symbolic act or event to take place. First we need to consider the conditions that make the symbolizing part possible; second, the conditions of what is symbolized by the symbolizing part; and third, the conditions of conjunction or coincidence. The analysis of these conditions allows us to derive the distinct, stair-like *symbolic categories*.

The categories are not derived here by an analysis of the forms of judgments, like in Kant; nor do they proceed from an examination, conscious or unconscious, of the generic forms of language, like in Aristotle. What allows the establishment here of a *table of categories* is the analysis of the process through which the symbolic event (or unifying conjunction of the two parts, symbolizing and symbolized) take place.

In order to constitute the symbolizing part we need four conditions:

1. That this part possess a *material substrate*.
2. That this substrate, nonetheless, has been ordered and organized in an expository field that must be called a *cosmos* or *world*.
3. That this cosmos can be established as the setting that makes possible an *encounter* between a certain (sacred) presence that appears and a certain (human) witness that can testify to it.
4. That this encounter, or presencing relation, can be culminated through communication (spoken or written).

These four conditions determine the symbolizing part that is available and manifest. But this re-sends or refers to the symbolized part which is unavailable. Consequently,

1. The manifest symbol must refer to certain hermeneutic keys that allow us to determine the (ideal) figures that can fix the meaning of the manifest symbol.
2. The exegetical keys must necessarily collide with a major limit that annihilates all enquiry into meaning such that the referral can only happen in *mystical form*.

Once the symbolizing conditions (matter, cosmos, presence, *logos*) and those pertaining to the symbolized (keys of meaning, mystical substrate) are determined,

all the essential requirements needed to produce the symbolic event are fixed. All that remains, then, is to determine the conditions of the ultimate unification of the two parts of the symbol. Thus arises the final and decisive category which establishes the necessity of the reestablishment of that which was distant and separated.

Here is the table of symbolic categories:

**SYMBOLIZING CATEGORIES**

1. Matter
2. Cosmos
3. Presencing relation (between presence and witness)
4. Communication (spoken, written)

**CATEGORIES RELATED TO THE SYMBOLIZED OF THE SYMBOL**

5. (Exegetical) keys of meaning
6. Sacred and holy (or mystical) substrate

**UNIFYING CATEGORY**

7. Conjunction of the two parts of the symbol

Seven dimensions or categories of the symbol emerge from the symbolic event:

1) First, fundamental *matter* appears without volatilization from the symbol (in concept or idea). Such a foundation requires us to think of the category of *matter* in a fundamental sense: one that pays attention to its etymology (matrix, mother, *hylē*, wood, jungle). Matter constitutes the *positive presupposition* without which no symbolic event is given. Every symbol refers to *Magna Mater* (maternal, potency, matrix) as a fundamental substrate of meaning.

2) But the symbolic event requires an ordering of the *hylē* (jungle, wood) into a *cosmos* where the density of the woods is delimited and circumscribed, or the jungle is “civilized”, clearing and trimming the *delimited* space of the *tenemos* (temple), the genuine cosmic temple. In virtue of such demarcation, matter becomes *cosmos*. The symbolic event celebrates (as a festival) the original inaugural act of the construction or “creation” of the *cosmos*. Such cosmic creation determines the second category or condition of the symbolic event.

3) Matter and cosmos provide, by means of their conjunction and coincidence, the setting where the symbolic event can take place. In order to be produced, this setting requires, thirdly, the presence or presentation of the two “parts” (the symbolizing and the symbolized) face to face in such a way that they develop into a manifest and declarative *presencing relation*: the encounter of that hidden part that finally becomes obvious and visible (as presence) with the (human) *witness* is raised toward the limit of the world in its condition of being the “symbolized part” of the encounter. Therefore, the encounter between the (sacred) presence and the (human) witness takes place in the presencing relation. This *presencing relation* is determined, then, as the third condition of possibility of the symbolic event.

4) In the presencing relation the communication that establishes the presence (configured in some sort of theophany) and the witness happens. Therefore, a dialogical relation is exposed and concretized, one which manifests itself in *logos*, thinking-saying, the culmination of the encounter. The dialogical situation is determined as revealed or inspired word and holy scripture. In it the presencing relation, or the encounter between the sacred presence and the witness, is completed. In this way, a fourth category is promoted, without which the symbolic event cannot be produced.

5) These designated categories refer to the *manifest* aspect of the symbolic event. They determine its unfolding in the realm of appearance or determine, one after another, the (external and exoteric) symbolizing part of the symbol. Therefore it is now necessary to open this *literal* revelation to its horizon of meaning, or enquire into the (allegorical, exegetical) keys that allow us to understand that which up to now has been exposed in external or manifest form. It seems, then, that without this condition as the fifth category the symbol would lack a horizon of reference: the category related to the hermeneutical keys of meaning, or the ideal (allegorical, exegetical) keys that allow us to open the door and the way towards meaning (to the unavailable part, symbolized in the symbol).

6) But these hermeneutical keys (ideas, forms) crash against a *limit* beyond which the exegetical enquiry into meaning is lost or it bumps into a wall of darkness and silence. In this tessitura, the sixth category is revealed as the emergence of the *mystical* horizon which divides the symbolic event and reveals the enigmatic and mysterious character which encloses every symbol (referred in the last instance to the hermetic realm).

7) The fifth and sixth categories determined that which the symbol symbolizes (conditions of meaning and the ultimate void in which meaning is lost). The seventh category reveals the conditions which facilitate the joining of the two parts, the symbolizing and the symbolized. In this final category, then, the (limiting) space in which such a union is produced is designated. An order of being occurs, along with the organon of knowledge that made it possible, and, above all, the actors (personas, masks) that take on the role of each of the parts.

In this last category the symbol is produced *as symbol* in its synthetic, existential unity. In it the symbolizing part (or the witness of presence) and that which the symbolizing part determines (the presence of the sacred) recognize each other in their identity of being and event. Both come to understand their character or *ethos*: they constitute the indispensable components of a sole *sym-bolic* event which finally obtains the existential rubric of its unity.

Both witness and presence, the components of the symbol, are understood in their unified and copulated character. They are determined in and through the *existential copulation* that is realized in the *entelecheia* of the symbolic act. Through this amorous metaphor (or dialectic of sexual desire and love-passion),

witness and presence strive and strain to delineate every episode and avatar that drive us to the ideal horizon of symbolic coupling.

It is through these seven categories, then, that the symbolic event is produced. Each one determines one of the necessary conditions (the symbolic *act* cannot be produced without any one of them). They are, in fact, milestones and episodes of a single complex plotline in which the symbolic event develops and resolves itself. This is, in effect, a story (*mythos*) through which the course of the event is narrated and plotted, in which the two parts of the symbol, initially disjoined, are brought into proximity and conjoined.

Such a (mythical, plotted, narrative) tale is staged, as an action or an operation, in ceremonial forms and rituals that are proper to it (sacrifices, fundamentally). The symbolic event calls forth the narrative (mythical) forms and ceremonial (sacrificial) institutions that are implemented. These are modulated around each of the explicated categories.<sup>10</sup>

4

Each of these categories is determined by their synchronous relation with the others, defining in this way the *logical space* of the symbolic event. Such logical space constitutes the structure —constant and fixed— which appears in every symbolic event. The structure can be read in the following horizontal line which reveals the synchronous relation between each of the indicated dimensions:

<u>CATEGORIES (Synchrony)</u>						
Matter	Cosmos	Presence	<i>Logos</i>	Keys	Mystic	Symbol

In every symbolic event every dimension is always present (since each category is relative to all others, just like a particular musical interval —e.g. C Major— which in relation to all those distributed in the musical space under “equal temperament”).

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<sup>10</sup> All symbols imply, as already said, an alliance (in which the fragments of the coin or medal are taken as a password). The alliance stipulates a relationship of reciprocity between (personified) presence and witness. This is realized, as action or operation, through the sacrificial act (exchange of offerings in exchange for an expectation of gifts). With this goal one invokes (in the hymn) the respective presence (of a god, for example), and the tale of his exploits is recalled (mythical content that specifies the narration associated with the theophany). In consideration of the implantation in the sacrificial scene, the symbolic event acquires real and “pragmatic” character. Sacrifice is, in effect, the dramatic scenery of the symbolic event. It reveals the character of alliance and pact of reciprocity that is inherent in all symbolic acts.

But it must be said that the logical and structural space should always appear, like all musical phrases, in a certain *key* that allows for its (diachronous) exposition. These very categories allow the key to be determined. To do this it is sufficient to arrange them in vertical form, suggesting seven distinct distributions of logical space of the symbol in accordance with the “tonal election” that is realized in each case:

<p><u>CATEGORIES (Diachrony)</u>  Matter  Cosmos  Presence  <i>Logos</i>  Hermeneutical Keys  The Mystical  Symbolic Conjunction</p>
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One can then draw the *categorical table* that arises from the conjunction of the possible double treatment of the relations between the different symbolic categories:

<b>Synchrony</b> <b>Diachrony</b>	Matter	Cosmos	Presence	<i>Logos</i>	Ideal Keys	The Mystical	Symbolic Conjunction
Matter	<b>Matter</b>						
Cosmos		<b>Cosmos</b>					
Presence			<b>Presence</b>				
<i>Logos</i>				<b><i>Logos</i></b>			
Ideal Keys					<b>Ideal Keys</b>		
The Mystical						<b>The Mystical</b>	
Symbolic Conjunction							<b>Symbolic Conjunction</b>

Such a table determines the course of the investigation which happens here in which, by means of the conjunction of the two coordinates, arises a stair-like progression that is highlighted in bold. These reveal the *key* which, in each symbolic event, serves as the key from which the logical space of the symbol is organized.

I will call the bolded boxes *revelations* which define an *eon* or *avatar* in which the symbol appears in this or that selected key. All of them allow for certain reflections about the “philosophy of history” which the progression (or key scales) specifies. It can be said, in effect, that in every eon or avatar the conjunction of all dimensions

of the symbol appear organized out of the hegemony of one of these, which overdetermines the rest and acts as the “tonic” in respect to others.

These keys that serve as the “tonic”, or what exerts a hegemonic function over the rest, emerge according to the logical criterion of its place in the staircase in a way that constitutes or institutes *successive revelations* through which the symbolic event forms. This develops through the stair-like linking of the revelations. Or better said: through the progression or scale of categorical dimensions they are gradually revealed. Revelation is, in fact, the mode through which the distinct categorical determinations that make possible the symbolic event emerge.<sup>11</sup> Those determinations mark their dominion and hegemony upon the rest, always ordering and organizing from one key or another. Each revelation establishes what could be called, in symbolic terms, an era or epoch of the world.<sup>12</sup>

There will be, consequently, an epoch or eon of the world in which *matter* will have dominion over all other categories. This, in its basic matrix condition, under the symbolic form of *Magna Mater*, will preside over the whole development of the symbolic event, ordering and organizing all other categorical determinations from it. Such an epoch of the world will be, furthermore, the first to reveal itself: it will constitute the most archaic and original revelation of the symbolic event. It will dominate, in effect, in what is usually called “prehistory”, establishing the character of all other categories from it.

Secondly, there will be an epoch of the world which will attend to the “creation” of the *cosmos*. The symbolic event will then celebrate the festive, liturgical, or sacrificial recreation of the original event in virtue of which certain undifferentiated matter was ordered and organized in order to constitute a “world”.

The whole symbolic development will therefore be structured around the original cosmogony and its ritualistic, ceremonial, or festive repetition. The narration or myth, and the celebration or sacrifice, will remember once and again the submission of a certain substrate of chaos, abyss, or darkness and the emergence of a world (which, as in Egyptian cosmogony, is perhaps symbolized as a mound that rises from the dark background of the swamp waters).

In this *eon*, consequently, cosmogonies and theogonies, “creation hymns” or episodes like those in the Book of Genesis or in Hesiod will be abundant. All remaining categories will be polarized or magnetized by this inaugural act in virtue of which the passage from chaos to cosmos, or from prime matter to the “creation” of the world, is produced.

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<sup>11</sup> Understanding by revelation that which makes something present and manifest through the symbol: what *appears* from the core (= x) of the sacred and holy. It is, then, the very *phenomenon* of the symbolic (or the sacred in its “phenomenological” showing).

<sup>12</sup> The term *eon* or *avatar* highlights that the epochs or eras can only be established in reference to the symbolic event. They are, then, symbolic ages that cannot be mechanically extrapolated to what can be understood as “material history” (relative to economic, social, or political conditions, or to a “history of mentalities”), no matter how obviously related to other possible focus points of history.

Once matter (*Magna Mater*) is revealed and transformed into cosmos, there will be a third age that finally prepares the scene in which the encounter between the manifest form of the sacred, finally present (as theophany), and the witness who is able to receive the revelation (at the peak of the holy mountain, in the depths of the woods, or inside the cosmic temple) becomes possible.

In the fourth age, the *verbal* character of the symbolic event will take categorical predominance. This age will be organized around the communication that is established between the manifest presence (as theophany) and the witness. It will be, then, the specific word or *logos* of the communication that is subsequently revealed and brought to light. The whole symbolic event will be derived from the hegemonic character that the *logos* will establish (susceptible to be revealed as inspired or revealed word or as sacred scripture).

In the fifth age it will be necessary to specify the hermeneutical keys that allow us to open the seals that contain the true meaning of the expressed word or the revealed text. It will arise, therefore, from exoteric and manifest revelation or literal meaning, to ideal keys that, by way of logical hypostases, preserve the order of the meaning of what was communicated. The ascension co-opts the symbolic event as exegetical event. What results is a definition of the symbolic event as allegory.

But this allegorical or allegorizing intellectualism of the fifth age will finally collide with an ultimate limit that annihilates all restless exegetical searches for meaning. Beyond all interpretation, therefore, the symbolic event will be celebrated as a mystical and nuptial encounter with the ultimate substrate of the sacred and holy in which the gloomy and luminous character of the symbolic event will be at once revealed.

Finally, the symbolic event will descend from the heavenly and sublime heights to an intermediate space where the encounter between presence and witness can join together in such a way that both can recognize each other in their equality of status and in their (dialectic) identity of nature.

“Symbol” is not to be understood here as a vicarious substitute that “represents” *something other* than a presence or a thing. The symbol is not a contract or covenant that arbitrates a bilateral nexus between a certain “symbolizing” matter and that which is symbolized by it (in the sense of substitutive or vicarious representation). The symbol, *sym-bolon*, etymologically refers to a “password”: a fragment of a coin or a divided medal that only fulfills its purpose when joined

together again with its disjoined half. The symbol is realized as symbol when the two parts are “thrown together” and one can notice, as a result, whether they come together. This is, then, a break in the symbol. There is also a final test in which one tries to reestablish the unity that was originally lost.

The symbol, in effect, presupposes an *original break*, a matrix of self-limitation. This break will later be called the *caesura*. Such a caesura comes from the same character as the *being of the limit*. If such a caesura were not to exist, the limit would not unfold itself into the three realms.<sup>13</sup>

But the essence of the symbol consists in opening a *logical space* in which, because of its own categorical flow, brings about (in the end) the stitching together of what was broken. This presupposes the creation of a scenario that makes the joining (encounter and recognition) of the two parts of the symbol (symbolizing and symbolized) possible. The symbol is the logical form that corresponds to the existence of the limit. Such a form is configured and formed through a complex event in which different links or milestones of its constitution can be determined: we will call these symbolic categories.

The essence of the symbol consists in its ability to unite what is broken. This happens in the seventh category of the symbol, or the unifying and synthesizing category. This is by far the most relevant symbolic operation or action. It grants a synthetic horizon to what previously appeared as analysis. But analysis is not exterior to the symbolic phenomenon. It is not imposed from the outside as it occurs in the analysis that gives rise to *epistēmē* or science. The symbol, by its own nature as symbol, unfolds its own division and doubling, perhaps raising itself towards a synthetic horizon once it has generated its immanent analytic.

In this horizon the symbol is completed as the correlation between its two *relata* (between the sensible form and what it symbolizes). But in its diachronous and historical unfolding, before the completion of the symbolic event (as the final act, as *entelecheia*), these parts remain disjoined, as long as they can, by means of successive revelations that get closer and approximate itself.

This movement of mutual desire and craving, or this eroticism of the parts, gives us a clue to understanding what rigorously constitutes the historical pilgrimage that proceeds and anticipates the completion of the unique and grandiose occurrence that constitutes the symbolic event (finally accomplished and achieved). As we will see later on, eroticism is especially useful in defining the reciprocal relation that occurs in the last category between the two parts and their particular personifications.

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<sup>13</sup> The three realms—the realm of appearance, the frontier realm, and the hermetic realm—were treated in *Lógica del límite*. The topology presented in that book constitutes the *presupposition* of this book.

The first six categories are, then, of *analytic* character. Only the last category opens a *synthetic* horizon. But this, in the historic setting that the symbolic event goes through, can only be *anticipated*.<sup>14</sup> This point will be explained when the last, decisive category is determined.

In fact, the last symbolic category, upon determining the conditions of the completion of the symbolic act, suffers from an irremediable crisis of overabundance. A new event in the development of history emerges from the *amorous copulation* that constitutes it: a true *novum*. The symbolic event emerges once the achieved copulation is completed; in effect, a new development of events will be, in its time, conveniently related.

Out of the symbolic act an event appears, like a newborn baby, overflowing and transcending the entire development of the events that the symbolism has spun. Out of the completed symbol, as we will see, *spirit*, the authentic creature born of the matrix prepared by the symbolic cycle, is born and grows. This *spiritual* birth will determine, then, the promotion of a new cycle of events that will be called the *spiritual cycle*; this will institute a new stairway, or the same categorical channels (matter, world, presence, etc.) transposed to a new tonal register.

The seven categories of the symbol promote a gradual revelation. They erupt, one after another, by way of archetypical phases. In terms of collective epic, or of personal *ethos*, they can be determined as epochs, ages, days. They compose, in their historical exposition, a genuine *heptameron* related to seven days (by means of historical archetypes). For example, there exists a first age in which the totality of the symbolic emerges from the material (or matrix) category, from the angle of the matrix (*Magna Mater*). Or again a second age reveals the *cosmological* character of the symbol, its settlement into a place (temple or city) and its determination of a proper and specific time (the festival that revives the original cosmogony).

A third age specifies the “place of encounter” between the sacred presence that emerges and reveals itself as theophany (personified in a host of figures or rather folded into the form of a unique *Dominus* or “lord of the universe”), opening itself to vision and perception before a witness (prophet, *rsi*, or poet).<sup>15</sup> Then a fourth age, which conceives of that presence through the form of communication, as

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, the symbolic consummation or unifying existential copula between witness and presence appears only as an *ideal horizon*. To the extent that being is, here, assumed as *being of the limit* (that is within the stigma of the *caesura*, a “counterrhythm” that always introduces disharmony and dysfunction, an authentic *diabolus in musica*), such a fully realized conjunction, as *entelecheia*, uniquely constitutes a horizon. This is why the seventh eon of the symbolic cycle, corresponding to the conjunctive or unifying category, far from being the full realization of the long-awaited symbolic act, can only be *anticipated*. In fact, the amorous act gives place to the conception and gestation of a new cycle of events: the *spiritual cycle*, as it will be called, will be determined by a recreation of the whole categorical table. *Spirit* is the concept that is born from that recreation.

<sup>15</sup> *Rsi* is the term that names, in Sanskrit, the poet-prophet or seer, the author of the Vedic revelation (the Vedas).

sacred word, as *logos*, or as holy scripture. The whole categorical development of the symbol will therefore remain polarized and magnetized by the verbal category relative to the word or the text.

There will be, finally, a fifth age in which the “methods” through which the true meaning of the revealed worlds and texts can be specified: the exegetical forms that allow one to elevate or ascend from the literal nature of the world and the text towards the intelligible and allegorical keys of meaning. And there will be a sixth epoch in which the symbolic event audaciously tries to surpass the allegorical intellectualism in order to directly communicate with the hermetic realm of the sacred and the holy: an opening will then be established toward the experience of the encounter with the “luminous darkness” and a subsequent procession that establishes the hieratic or hierarchical mark of the effusion that promotes an ineffable, incomprehensible, “light of enlightenment”.

Ultimately, an epoch will be created in which the symbolic event has reached maturity and is ready for a genuine and reciprocal encounter and recognition between the absent presence of the sacred and the witness that bears witness and testifies to it, finally equal in standing.

Seven ages, then, can be determined; or, if one prefers, seven days that compose the temporal breaks or *seasons* of this complex and grandiose unfolding plot that institutes the symbolic event.

First age: *Magna Mater* (matter, matrix, *silva*): the savage dimension of the symbol. In this original springtime of symbolism the *vital* character of the symbol—its fertile and fecund nature—is revealed. In this dimension the theophantic figures of the feminine vulva, the Great Animal, and the Woman are relevant; the sanctuary in which the symbolic event is celebrated presents itself like a womb, a cavern or cave of prehistory. This hierophant witness has not yet detached its hand from its connection to the principle wall. The cave wall, with its features, constitutes the site for the presence of the sacred. The hierophant’s hand highlights the features of the wall with inscriptions or original forms of writing that all seem to refer, like a key of meaning, to the general principle of genesis and fecundity. This is instituted as a symbolic form under the imposing character of the Great Animal, the Vulva, or the Woman.

Second age: the creation of the world (the inauguration of the cosmic temple that constitutes the city). We transition from the savage world of the first *eon* to the constitution of the “barbaric” world of municipal and state organization. Now the whole world, the cosmos, with its cardinal directions, its orientations, its hierarchies (heaven, atmosphere, earth, underground) constitutes the ambit in which (as temple) the space of the revelation of the sacred is delimited. In this *eon* the appearance of the cosmos as a determinant symbolic form emerges: the emergence of the primordial mound in battle with the first Egyptian gods. Cosmogonic figures who personify the dominating ordination of the matrix substrate are instituted (Marduk’s fight with the dragon Diamat, as found in the

Mesopotamian *Hymn of Creation*). The symbolic event is celebrated in the form of festive ceremonies or cosmic sacrifices. Through these inaugural acts, the transformation of matter into a cosmos could be produced, or, in and from the matrix, the revelation of a “world”, with its own values of hierarchy and orientation, could arise. The remaining categories are organized in and through the dominant determination of this original cosmogony that myths and sacrifices revive and memorialize.

Third age: the presencing theophany before the human witness. It could be said that we now transition, following the Biblical sequence, from *Genesis* to *Exodus*. We move to the first plane of categorical attention to the encounter between the sacred presence, personified in some theophany, and the witness that receives the theophany in a visual and presencing form. The presentation, as we will see, can take on two characteristic modalities according to whether the witness of the presence be a poet or a prophet. Correspondingly, there will also be two modes of appearance, either as a multiplicity of theophantic figures which leads the poet to a hymn or epic, or as a set of theophantic presences that refer to a sole *Dominus* or “lord of the universe” that leads the prophet to revelation. The most characteristic feature of the third *eon* is produced by this bifurcation between the “poetic area” (India, Greece) and the “prophetic area” (Iran, Israel). Such bifurcation, as we will see, is found in the fourth *eon*, in which the logical form of communication established between witness and presence tries to be determined.

Fourth age: The revelation of the encounter between sacred presence and witness is now produced as verbal or written exposition. As a result, “holy scriptures”, hymns and epics (in Greece and India) or prophecies (Iran, Israel), are produced. This fourth age turns on the verbal and written character of revelation such that the set of these are crystallized and condensed into a certain idea related to the word (*Wāch* in Sanskrit, *logos* in Greek) or to scripture (the Hebrew *Torah*). Word and scripture appear, then, as a hypostatic form in which symbolic revelation of the sacred finds its completion. Fifth age: the determination of exegetical and allegorical keys of meaning for the symbol communicated (in sacred word or holy scripture). The keys create a “first world” which is in contrast to the “external world” (where literal and exoteric revelation of word and scripture take place). The first world creates a *plērōma* that preserves the hidden and esoteric meaning of the manifest symbol. The symbolic event consists in the *exegetical ascent* toward the first world that preserves and guarantees meaning or allows one to open the keys and fastening bolts of the meaning of the revealed and communicated symbol. Such ascension is realized in the form of liberating and salvational *gnōsis*: an illumination related to the ideal keys of meaning that allow one to open one’s eyes and ears to the hidden, esoteric truth that surrounds the revealed word or sacred scripture.

Sixth age: the exegetical ascent, however, collides with a Major Limit that keeps the final substrate of the meaning of the sacred hidden or closed off. The symbolic event therefore substitutes an ascent toward the liminal encounter with that which is radically outside: the mystical background of meaning. It is through this

mystical encounter that one can now break into a great emanative process of the primordial “light of enlightenment” captured in the mystical encounter such that the set of existing things composes a procession of hierarchical forms. If the fifth age had as one of its foci of historical splendor the later Roman world or “late antiquity”, this sixth eon finds one of its characteristic historical forms in the medieval world divided between the Islamic and Christian areas.

Seventh age: once the symbolizing part of the symbol, which unfolds in the first four eons, and the symbolized part, discovered and colonized in the fifth and sixth eons, are determined, one can now specify the way that the symbolic event as such can be completed: how to put together effectively the two parts of the symbol.

## 6

Each of these epochs is characterized by the preferred form of revelation, in each case, of one of the seven symbolic categories. These set themselves up, every time, as the determining style of the symbolic event as it develops. They constitute, as we have seen, a progression, something like a musical scale. Between each epoch and the next, a natural “modulation” of this or that category is produced. They form a union through which one or another category emerges (which functions as the “tonic” of the articulation of symbolic logical space). The hegemonic category establishes, then, a certain “tonal” hierarchy (analogous to the musical distribution of tones and semitones) that determines the way the resulting categories are constituted: these are specified in a distinct way every time (according to which is the dominant category).

In each eon, or avatar, one determined category is dominant. But the others always reappear. So it is impossible to produce the symbolic event without the totality of the symbolic logical space given as a structural presupposition. It follows, then, that every category is already called together from the first epoch or age, but every time they are oriented and magnetized by the “tonal attraction” that this or that category exerts on each occasion.

For this reason the table that constitutes the crossing of the synchronic and diachronic relationships of the distinctive categories reveal, in addition to the scale or progression between the distinct hegemonic categories, a multitude of empty categorical squares that ought to be “refilled” by the specific characteristics that, in each case or epoch, take on the different categories.

It can be said, then, that every category is prone to a triple reading: as a category relative to the progression of the said union (which reveals the joining of epoch or the categories that serve as “tonic”); that would be the “diagonal” reading of the

categorical table. It could also be read as a hegemonic category (horizontal reading of the table). Finally, it could be read as a category that “vertically” expands throughout the totality of logical space, leaving each specific and modified moment by means of the dominant category (e.g. “matter”, which would appear again and again every time, modified by that which were the dominant category).

It could be said that the categories are in a latent state “before” they accord with dominant forms that function as the tonic. For example, world, presence, *logos*, etc. subsist as latent forms in the first eon which the hegemony of the category of matter establishes. Likewise it can be affirmed that the categories already were objects of revelation or that their hegemony was established in a determined eon, reappearing later, but as presupposed form. The categories can be, therefore, *latent, hegemonic, or presupposed*.

I have not proposed to fill in the empty boxes but rather simply given indications or rough sketches that would allow, at some other time, one to show in an exhaustive way the pertinence of this structural model. Such a model is conceived here as the *logical space* that gives form to *being*, to a being understood as the *being of the limit*. In its categorical forms, this model unfolds the *logical symbolic form* that corresponds to the *being of the limit*. Such a form continues the consummate finality through which the complex event that the symbol constitutes. In virtue of this form the symbol bestows *logos* to being, to a being determined as the *being of the limit*.<sup>16</sup>

It could be said that the *first day* of the *heptameron* is characterized by the choice of C Major as the tonic. In terms relative to the chosen dimension of the symbol, it is *the material* aspect of the symbol, its maternal and matrix side, which brings about this eon.

On the *second day* the inaugural act that allows for the creation or transformation of matter into cosmos or world is revealed.

On the *third day* the revelation of the encounter between the presence of theophany, which emerges from hiding or overcomes the infinite distance which separates it from the witness, and the person that stands out from the community who is apt to receive the revelation of theophany, is produced.

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<sup>16</sup> As already said, the coupling of the *being of the limit* and the *symbolic logical forms* can only be anticipated. This is why the “seventh age” that celebrates the ontologico-amorous conjugation of the parts of the symbol (through the *existential copula* that reveals the *hierogram* between the witness and the presence of the sacred), instead of closing the order of the historical event, only ends that which is called in this text the *symbolic cycle*. What is born of this copula is the chrysalis of a new cycle of events and experiences: the spiritual cycle. It is the newborn spirit, truly *Puer aeternus*, which the symbolic event gestated. The symbol is, as we will see, the very *womb* of spirit: its generative and vital matter, its maternal matrix entrails. Thus these “seven ages” of the symbolic cycle will be followed by a *recreation* of the same in the proper and specific framework of spirit. In turn each one of these will be determined in detail and together (see further the beginning of the *third book*).

On the *fourth day* the *voice* of the presence is revealed, or a dialogue between it and the witness is forged. The two parts of the symbolic event begin to speak, thus determining the word that rises from the confrontation or the text that involves the witness of the encounter.

On the *fifth day* the symbol folds onto itself once it has gestated its manifest revelation (as matter, cosmos, presence, and *logos*), opening something hidden that entails the hermeneutical keys that can render intelligent meaning. Such an opening highlights the hypostases and names that can be determined respective to what is hidden and esoteric.

On the *sixth day* one ascends from the hypostases to the heart of the luminous darkness, opening oneself to the nuptial or *mystical form* of a silent encounter.

And on the *seventh day* the realm of appearance and the hermetic realm come together in the frontier realm, uniting what once was separated and finally throwing together the two fragments of the symbol. The link, then, between both fragments or the divided coin or medal is created.

From this copulation emerges, as we will see, a new cycle of events and experiences: a new *way* of determining historical events. From the *symbolic* modality of the event we will move on, then, to the *spiritual* modality. This emergence from the fully completed symbolic act will be characterized, above all, by inhibiting the symbolic character of the revelation of the sacred.

Spirit tends, in effect, to allow the symbolic form of (sensible) expression of the sacred to stay hidden. Therefore, the *age of spirit* can be called, in a certain way, *the time of great hiddenness*.<sup>17</sup> In this age, or in this general cycle of events, the symbol will continue to be, though in a discreet form, in the “silenced music” of an experience of intimacy and solitude. In fact, symbolism will only appear in the setting of a clandestine event. This includes the forms of test and caesura (*diabolic*) in relation to a new register of events that will have its general global key in spirit.

From the removal of the symbolic will emerge, in the bosom of the spiritual cycle, the possibility of a manifest and exoteric revelation of spiritual content. Such revelation of *logos* that corresponds to the *manifest* side of spirit will be that which, again in the bosom of the cycle, can be rigorously called *reason* (as we have understood the term since Descartes and Galileo). But reason is only, as we will see, the *manifest* side of spirit. This, in the course of its own revelation, will be required to fold its rational revelation into some hermeneutical keys of meaning that, in the end, will require the reappearance of the inhibited container of symbolism.

Finally, it will be possible to determine and define spirit, upon its full completion, as the *ideal* (not utopian) horizon of a possible anticipated and asymptotic

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<sup>17</sup> This term acquires its full relevance in the context of Twelfth Shi'ism, as we will see.

synthesis of reason and symbolism. At the end of the book spirit can be defined as *the complete synthesis of reason and symbolism* that the spiritual cycle, in its final developments, cannot but be craved for and anticipated.

Such a synthetic horizon, which can serve as an ideal asymptote, sheds light, I believe, on the contemporary historical situation. This investigation intends, by means of a trip through this long and complex *spiritual odyssey*, to present this synthesis as the ideal horizon of an *age of spirit* that can serve, in relation to our historical present, like a *North Pole* that provides orientation and light to our ethical, gnoseological, and epic needs.